FROM HELL TO PARADISE:
The Stages of Vietnamese Refugee Migration
under the Comprehensive Plan of Action

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A thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
of the Australian National University

February 2000
Declaration

Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work.

Paul Foley
February 2000
Dedicated to the memory of my parents.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

An extensive study such as the one undertaken for this thesis is not possible without the assistance of many people. Unfortunately, it impossible to acknowledge every person who assisted me with this research. Consequently, I hope they will accept this as my heartfelt thanks for their assistance. However, there are a number of people who I would like to personally thank for their special contribution.

First, I must express my sincere gratitude to all the Vietnamese refugees who were interviewed over a period of eighteen months in the Philippines and Australia. There were literally hundreds of refugees who took the time to answer my questions about their lives as refugees, and tell me about their refugee experience. I would like to acknowledge their assistance here, without which, this thesis would not have been possible. In effect, this is their story. I hope I have done it justice.

There are a number of special Vietnamese friends who I would like to thank—especially Thong, Nhung, Sang, Anh, Mui and Phung for sharing so much with me. I hope that you are all continuing to enjoy yourselves in Australia. To Phouc, Luc and others, who unfortunately did not obtain refugee status and returned to Vietnam, I hope life is more bearable there now then when you escaped a few years ago.

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ABSTRACT

The exodus of more than 1.5 million Vietnamese refugees has been one of the most significant population displacements of the last twenty-five years, influencing national, regional and international refugee policies. The migration of Vietnamese refugees between 1975 and 1996 can be divided into five distinct waves. However, it is the fifth and final wave of refugees from Vietnam that is the focus of this research.

The introduction of the Comprehensive Plan of Action in 1989 was a turning point in the reception and management of refugees from Vietnam. Asylum-seekers were no longer automatically granted refugee status but were required to establish their refugee status under international law. This also meant that previous models of the stages of refugee migration were inappropriate for explaining the migration of Vietnamese refugees since 1989 and a new model of the stages of Vietnamese refugee migration was required.

The aim of this study was to conduct research on all stages of the Vietnamese refugee experience. This was achieved by undertaking extensive qualitative research at the Regional Resettlement Transit Center (RRTC) in the Philippines. Historical sources and personal narratives from refugee respondents were used to examine the conditions in Vietnam—both prior to the fall of Saigon in 1975, but more importantly, subsequently. In addition, in-depth interviews were conducted with refugees to discover why respondents fled Vietnam, together with details of their flight from Vietnam and arrival in an asylum country—either Hong Kong or the Philippines, opinions on conditions in the first asylum camps and detention centres, the screening and appeal processes, conditions at the Regional Resettlement Transit Camp in the Philippines, and resettlement to Australia. Follow-up interviews were conducted with sixteen refugee respondents after they had resettled to Australia, to discuss aspects of their early resettlement.
A six stage model was developed from these investigations to explain Vietnamese refugee migration since 1989. This model may also be appropriate for explaining other refugee migrations that are occurring where screening procedures have been implemented.
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<tr>
<td>ABS</td>
<td>Australian Bureau of Statistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMEP</td>
<td>Adult Migrant English Program</td>
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<tr>
<td>AMS</td>
<td>Auxiliary Medical Services (Hong Kong)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARVN</td>
<td>Army of the Republic of Vietnam</td>
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<tr>
<td>ASEAN</td>
<td>Association of South East Asian Nations</td>
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<td>AVS</td>
<td>Agency for Volunteer Service (Hong Kong)</td>
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<td>B-2</td>
<td>Public Security Bureau (PSB) (Vietnam)</td>
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<tr>
<td>BBC</td>
<td>British Broadcasting Corporation</td>
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<td>BID</td>
<td>Bureau of Immigration and Deportation (The Philippines)</td>
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<td>BIR</td>
<td>Bureau of Immigration Research (Australia)</td>
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<td>BIPR</td>
<td>Bureau of Immigration and Population Research (Australia)</td>
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<td>CADP</td>
<td>Center for Assistance to Displaced Persons (The Philippines)</td>
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<td>CAS</td>
<td>Civil Aid Service (Hong Kong)</td>
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<td>CIA</td>
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<td>CFSI</td>
<td>Community and Family Services International</td>
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<tr>
<td>CO</td>
<td>Cultural Orientation</td>
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<td>COMIGAL</td>
<td><em>Commissariat Général aux Réfugiés</em></td>
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<td>CPA</td>
<td>Comprehensive Plan of Action</td>
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<td>Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (Australia)</td>
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<tr>
<td>DMZ</td>
<td>Demilitarized Zone (Vietnam)</td>
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<tr>
<td>DP</td>
<td>Displaced Person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DRV</td>
<td>Democratic Republic of Vietnam</td>
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<tr>
<td>ECVII</td>
<td>Ex-China Vietnamese Illegal Immigrant</td>
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<tr>
<td>EFL</td>
<td>English as a Foreign Language</td>
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<td>ESF</td>
<td><em>Ecoles Sans Frontières</em></td>
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<td>GSAC</td>
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<td>HKFPA</td>
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<td>Hong Kong Government</td>
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<td>ICIR</td>
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</table>
ICMC  International Catholic Migration Commission
ICRA  Indo-Chinese Refugee Association (Australia)
ID  Index of Dissimilarity
IELTS  International English Language Testing System
IOM  International Organization for Migration
IRAP  International Research and Advisory Panel on Refugees and Other Displaced Persons
ISS  International Social Services
JRS  Jesuit Refugee Service
JVA  Joint Voluntary Agencies (United States of America)
LAVAS  Lawyers Assisting Vietnamese Asylum Seekers (Hong Kong)
LGA  Local Government Area (Australia)
MHD  Department of Health (Hong Kong)
MMCU  Migrant Medical Clearance Unit (Australia)
MOC  Medical Officer of the Commonwealth (Australia)
MRC  Migrant Resource Centre (Australia)
MSF  *Medicins Sans Frontières*
NCO  Non-Commissioned Officer
NEZ  New Economic Zone (Vietnam)
NGO  Non Government Organization
NSW  New South Wales (Australia)
NTFVI  National Task Force for Vietnamese Illegal Immigrants (Malaysia)
NVA  North Vietnam Army
ODP  Orderly Departure Program
ORP  Orderly Return Program
PAS  *Parti Islam SeMalaysia* – Pan Malaysia Islamic Party (Malaysia)
PAVN  People’s Army of Vietnam
PBRM  Philippine Baptist Refugee Ministries
PFAC  Philippines First Asylum Camp
PKI  *Partai Komunis Indonesia* – Indonesian Communist Party (Indonesia)
PRA  Principal Refugee Applicant
PROCOSS  Processing, Community Organization and Social Services office (The Philippines)
PRPC  Philippines Refugee Processing Center
PRTC  Philippines Refugee Transit Center
PSB  Public Security Bureau (B-2) (Vietnam)
QC  Queen's Counsel
RCHK  Refugee Concern Hong Kong
RHKPF  Royal Hong Kong Police Force
RRTC  Regional Resettlement Transit Center (The Philippines)
RS  Prefix to refugee number for person granted refugee status in the Philippines
RSRB  Refugee Status Review Board (Hong Kong)
SCF  Save the Children Fund
SAC  Special Assistance category
SHP  Special Humanitarian Program (Australia)
SLA  Statistical Local Area (Australia)
SRV  Socialist Republic of Vietnam
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>STARTTS</td>
<td>Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors (Australia)</td>
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<td>TC</td>
<td>Prefix to refugee number for person granted refugee status in Hong Kong</td>
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<td>TFIRAA</td>
<td>Task Force on International Refugee Assistance and Administration (The Philippines)</td>
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<td>UNHCR</td>
<td>United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees</td>
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<td>US</td>
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<td>USAID</td>
<td>United States Agency for International Development</td>
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<td>VBP</td>
<td>Vietnamese Boat People (Hong Kong)</td>
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<td>VC</td>
<td>Viet Cong</td>
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<td>VCA</td>
<td>Vietnamese Community of Australia</td>
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<td>VEAC</td>
<td>Victorian Ethnic Affairs Commission (Australia)</td>
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<td>VNA</td>
<td>Vietnam News Agency</td>
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<td>WRC</td>
<td>World Relief Corporation</td>
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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (or 1951 Convention)
On July 28, 1951, world governments adopted the "Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees." The Refugee Convention and its 1967 "Protocol" established the legal standards for refugee protection. This international document provides the most universally accepted definition of a refugee.

Aetas
One of the local aboriginal tribes in the Philippines belong to the Negrito group.

Amerasian (con lai or My lai)
Vietnamese fathered by an American serviceman.

Argoville Plan
The Argoville Plan was developed in response to the problem of rural subversion and guerrilla activities in 1958 and 1959. It aimed to alleviate insecurity by regrouping the population to self-contained and protected communities in areas that could be adequately controlled, thus cutting off the sources of Viet Cong support in the countryside.

Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN)
The South Vietnam Army.

asylum
Legal permission to live in a country given by its government to people fleeing danger or persecution in their original homelands.

asylum-seeker
A person who seekes safety in a foreign country from danger at home. Often, an asylum seeker must undergo a legal procedure in which the host country decides if he/she qualifies for refugee status. International law recognizes the right to seek asylum, but does not oblige states to provide it.

billet
Refugee housing in the Philippines.

"Blue Book"
A UNHCR booklet which provided information on screening for asylum-seekers. The "Blue Book" was given to all family heads who arrived in Hong Kong,
“Blue Guards”
Guards employed by the JISA Protective and Security Agency to maintain security at PRPC/RRTC.

chicken wing
A term used by Vietnamese used to signify rejection of refugee status. The first chicken wing was rejection by the screening authorities, the second chicken wing was rejection by the appeal authority. The third chicken wing was if UNHCR refused to use their mandate to grant refugee status.

Cao dai
A “counter-revolutionary” religious sect in Vietnam. The Cao Dai, which had supported the French, were—and remain—located primarily in the Mekong Delta area of southern Vietnam.

Comprehensive Plan of Action
An unprecedented tripartite agreement between origin, first asylum and resettlement countries to deter clandestine departures from Vietnam and Laos.

Community and Family Services International (CFSI)
A Hong Kong-based non-government organisation that was responsible for counselling and treating any refugees with mental health problems. They employed psychologists and psychiatrists, and trained refugees to be para-professionals.

Community Refugee Settlement Scheme
Scheme which enables community organisations to sponsor refugees who do not have private sponsors into Australia.

Correctional Services Department (CSD)
Hong Kong department responsible for managing some of the detention centres.

country of first asylum
A country of first asylum gives a person temporary asylum until he or she leaves for another country.

country of origin
A refugee’s native land

cut-off date
Dates set primarily in early 1989 that marked the introduction of conditions within the CPA.

demilitarized zone (DMZ)
A 10 kilometre wide band of land along both sizes of the seventeenth parallel and Ben hai River that seperated North and South Vietnam.
Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV)
That part of the Vietnam above the seventeenth parallel that was declared an independent state in 1945—also known as North Vietnam.

departure list
A list of the names of persons departing for Australia, that was posted on a notice board in the camp between one and two weeks before their departure. The departure lists contained the case number and name of the PRA, their case size, and their intended destination.

detention centre
Name give to first asylum camps in Hong Kong that housed Vietnamese asylum-seekers while they underwent refugee screening. Also housed persons rejected for refugee status who were to be repatriated to Vietnam.

dong
Currency of Vietnam.

durable solutions
Refugee protection and assistance organizations generally promote three "durable solutions" to refugees' plight: voluntary repatriation, local integration in the country of first asylum, or resettlement in a third country.

economic refugee
The term economic refugee is sometimes used to describe someone who does not meet the refugee definition because his or her survival is threatened not by persecution but by conditions like poverty or famine.

English as a Second Language (ESL)
Refugees resettling to an English-speaking country were taught English through the ESL Program.

English as a Foreign Language (EFL)
The EFL program was for refugees resettling to a non English-speaking country.

Ex-China Vietnamese Illegal Immigrants (ECVII)
Vietnamese asylum-seekers who were granted asylum in China, but later left and sought asylum in another first asylum country (principally Hong Kong).

Green Island
A first, or quarantine, station to receive Vietnamese asylum-seekers in Hong Kong.

Hoa Hao
One of the most powerful “counter-revolutionary” religious sects in Vietnam, which had supported the French. The Hoa Hao were—and remain—located primarily in the Mekong Delta area of southern Vietnam.
High Island Detention Centre
One of the major detention centres, described as Hong Kong’s worst institution.

Ho Chi Minh City
The former South Vietnamese capital of Saigon, which was renamed in honour of the first president of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.

Hoa
Vietnamese term used to describe a person of Chinese ancestry.

Internally displaced person
Someone who has been forced from his/her home for refugee-like reasons, but remains within the borders of his/her own country. Because the person is still under the jurisdiction of a government that might not want international agencies to help him/her, an internally displaced person might still be vulnerable to persecution or violence. There are more internally displaced people than refugees, and they are a growing concern.

International Organization for Migration (IOM)
IOM was responsible for medical examination of refugees on behalf of resettlement countries and international travel arrangements for refugees.

International Social Services, Hung Vuong, Inc. (ISS)
An non-government organisation jointly funded by UNHCR and a Dutch charity organisation through ISS Hong Kong to provide educational services in the camps

Involuntary repatriation
Involuntary repatriation, forced repatriation, or refoulement occurs when a person is forced to return to the home country against his or her will. This may occur when the country where a person seeks asylum does not recognize that person as a refugee; i.e., a person with a "well-founded fear of persecution."

Local integration:
When it is not safe for refugees to return home after a prolonged period in exile, a host government may decide to allow refugees to integrate locally, in the first-asylum country.

Longstayer
Generally defined as a person who has been in a refugee camp for more than two years.

Mandate
Under its 1950 statute, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees could use its mandate to grant refugee status to asylum-seekers. This action was used infrequently to grant refugee status to rejected asylum-seekers.
Migrant Medical Clearance Unit
A section of the Australian Department of Health, Housing, Local Government and Community Services (since renamed the Department of Health and Family Services) responsible for assessing the health of refugees and granting health clearance.

monkey house
Slang term used by Vietnamese for camp gaols. In PRPC/RRTC, the gaol was officially known as the Social Rehabilitation Center.

Montagnards
A French term for people of the mountains. A generic term to describe the 30 or more “primitive” societies located mainly in the mountainous, forested area that separates Vietnam and Laos.

National Defence Labour
A coinscripted national service in lieu of military service

Neighbourhood Eleven
One of two precincts at RRTC, consisting of twenty-three accommodation blocks.

Neighbourhood Twelve
The larger of the two precincts at RRTC, that comprised thirty accommodation blocks.

new economic zone (NEZ)
Underdeveloped rural areas that were targetted for development. Also the destinations for people in resettlement programs that were aimed to reduce urban population and redeploy labour.

open camp
Term used in Hong Kong for camps that housed refugees (as opposed to asylum camps). Residents of these camps were free to move in and out of the camps, and many refugees worked in Hong Kong factories

Operation Frequent Wind (or Option IV).
The American plan to evacuate Vietnamese from South Vietnam following the fall of the South Vietnamese government.

Operation Phoenix
American CIA and military intelligence operation aimed at “neutralizing” members of the Viet Cong civilian infrastructure through arrests, imprisonments and assassinations.

orderly departure program (ODP)
One of the elements of the Comprehensive Plan of Action to deter illegal boat departures was a program that would allow Vietnamese to travel directly from Vietnam to western countries.
orderly return program (ORP)
Another element of the Comprehensive Plan of Action was a program that would allow Vietnamese who had been rejected for refugee status to be returned to Vietnam and Laos.

People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN)
The army of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.

Philippines First Asylum Camp (PFAC)
This first asylum camp on the island of Palawan that housed Vietnamese asylum-seekers while they underwent refugee determination procedures. It also housed persons who had been rejected for refugee status until they repatriated to Vietnam.

Philippines Refugee Processing Center (PRPC)
A transit camp on the island of Luzon established by the Philippines government in 1979 to accommodate Indochinese from various first asylum countries throughout South East Asia.

Philippines Refugee Transit Camp (PRTC)
A transit camp operated on the outskirts of Manila to accommodate the transfer of refugees and asylum-seekers between camps in the Philippines.

piastre
The former currency of South Vietnam.

Pillar Point
The major open camp in Hong Kong which housed Vietnamese who had been granted refugee status. This was the last remaining camp in Hong Kong and closed in June 2000.

PROCROSS
The office at PRPC/RRTC responsible for the processing, community organization and social services of refugees in the camp.

reeducation camps
Reeducation camps were essentially concentration camps for former South Vietnamese military and civilian officials, political opponents, petty criminals and various other persons the authorities chose to detain without trial, and without any legal protection of recourse. The prisoners underwent an intensive political indoctrination program.

refoulement
When a person is forcibly returned to the home country where his or her life or freedom would be threatened. Also refers to when refugee boats are pushed back out to sea or when refugees are pushed back across a border.

refuge
Protection or shelter; relief; a place to which one goes for help, comfort, or escape.
refugee
A person who leaves his or her country of origin because of a "well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion." (Definition used by the United Nations.) The definition is sometimes expanded to include people fleeing war or other armed conflict.

refugee status determination
Those procedures conducted by officials of first asylum countries to determine whether asylum-seekers met international criteria for refugee status.

Refugee Status Review Board (RSRB)
Hong Kong’s refugee review body that heard appeals against negative refugee determination decisions.

rejected asylum-seeker
A person whose application for refugee status was rejected by a first-asylum government.

Regional Resettlement Transit Center (RRTC)
A British-funded transit camp used to relieve congestion in Hong Kong’s detention centres.

repatriate
To return someone to his or her home country.

Republic of Vietnam (RVN)
That area below the seventeenth parallel, formerly known as South Vietnam.

resettlement
Moving a refugee from the country of first asylum to another country where he or she can settle permanently. Resettlement occurs when the refugee has no hope of returning safely to the home country.

Royal Hong Kong Police Force (RHKPF)
Hong Kong’s police force managed some of the detention centres

Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV)
In 1976, North and South Vietnam were formally united as the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

sponsor
An organisation or person who agrees to assist an alien enter a country a legal immigrant.
strategic hamlets
A counter-insurgency program that placed “tactical” hamlets in areas of strategic importance. The hamlets were either developed from existing settlements and then fortified, or constructed as new fortified hamlets, and generally contained more than a thousand people.

tael
A Chinese unit of weight equal to 1.21 troy ounces or 37.79 grams. One tael was valued at about US$250 in 1978, but doubled to more than US$500 in 1979 (Wain, 1979).

Task Force on International Refugee Assistance and Administration (TFIRAA)
The organization responsible for the administration of refugee camps in the Philippines.

Tet
The most important Vietnamese festival celebrating the lunar New Year.

third-country resettlement:
Third-country resettlement is usually the last “durable solution” option. When repatriation would be unsafe and the first-asylum country refuses local integration, a third country must be found to accept the refugees.

Unaccompanied minor
A person less than eighteen years of age, who was not accompanied by an adult relative on their escape from Vietnam.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)
An international agency established in 1951, UNHCR is the branch of the United Nations charged with the international protection of refugees. UNHCR has increasingly been asked not only to protect refugees, but to provide assistance to them. Mrs. Sadako Ogata is the current high commissioner.

UNHCR Handbook
The handbook was produced to provide assistance to government officials concerned with screening procedures.

UNHCR Resettlement Officer
UNHCR staff member at the regional Resettlement Transit Center responsible for interviewing refugees upon arrival in the camp, and subsequently, submitting their names to resettlement countries for resettlement interviews.

Viet Cong (VC)
The insurgent guerrilla movement that fought the South Vietnamese government and its ally, the United States, was known to its enemies as the Viet Cong—from Viet-nam Cong-san meaning Vietnamese communists.

Viet Minh
The abbreviated and most commonly used name for the Viet Nam Doc Lap Dong Minh Hoi, or League for the Independence of Vietnam. The Viet Minh was the chief political-military organization that battled the French for independence (1946–1954).

**Whitehead Detention Centre**

The largest, and most infamous, detention centre in Hong Kong.
### Vietnamese Numbers

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A CENTURY OF REFUGEES

We come to you as refugees
foreigners from other lands.
We come to you
with our memories of pain and scars
of starvation and famine
of execution by fire
of eating faeces and the urine that goes with it
of rape and sexual violence
of seeing our children tortured.

We come to you as refugees
with our memories
of beatings and death threats
blindfolding and burning
stretching of testicles—and our screaming
of bound hands and feet
and hung upside down
like carcasses waiting for slaughter.

We come
with our memories
of solitary confinement in the blindness of hatred
of hot irons and suffocation
of brainwashing camps
of cold poured over us
of massacres and death threats
of deprivation of sleep
of mice running around in our mouths.

We come to you
with memories—
of living with violence
of pushing in drugs
of pulling out nails
of abduction and detention
of separation from loved ones—forever
—and the anguish of not knowing what happened.

We come to you as refugees
seeking peace
in a new home.

We come to you
—with hope in our hearts—
reclaiming ... the Power within!

Narelle Kinneally-Tolstoff (1995:95)
A CENTURY OF REFUGEES

Although the mass exodus of refugees has been a matter of concern throughout history, the frequency of these exoduses "is a dilemma belonging uniquely to the twentieth century" (Sutter, 1990:1). It is estimated that up to 150 million people migrated involuntarily during the last hundred years, with two-thirds having fled since 1945.1 The enormity of this population displacement led the German novelist Heinrich Böll to label this era as "a century of refugees and prisoners" (Rose, 1981:10). The number of people who fled to another country during the last century as a result of persecution, internal violence or international war greatly exceeds economically driven migrants (Zolberg, 1993:40).

The magnitude and increasing frequency of refugee outflows over the last fifty years—but particularly during the 1980s and 1990s2—together with the growing unwillingness of countries to grant asylum, and some dire predictions of insecurity in the new millennium,3 all suggest that the global refugee problem will be a continuing problem into the twenty-first century. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 1999) estimated that the global number of refugees at the beginning of 1999 was 11,491,710 persons—the smallest number for more than a decade.4 The

1 Various estimates on refugee displacements this century by Zwingmann and Pfister-Ammende (1973), Beyer (1981), Brandt (1980) and Stein (1983) place the number of refugees at between 100 and 140 million. At least 10 million additional refugees have fled since these estimates were made. D'Souza (cited in Sutter, 1990:5) estimated that between 60 and 100 million refugees had been displaced since 1945.

2 Global refugee numbers have increased significantly over the past twenty-five years. In 1975 it was estimated that there were 2.4 million refugees, and by 1985 this number had quadrupled to 10.4 million. Numbers continued increasing during the 1980s and 1990s, until reaching their zenith of 18.2 million in 1993. Since then numbers have declined to 13.2 million in 1997 (Roberts, 1998:377). At the beginning of 1999 there were approximately 11.5 million (UNHCR, 1999).

3 Kaplan (cited in UNHCR, 1995c:233) predicted that widespread anarchy in the early twenty-first century would generate a "tidal wave of refugees from environmental and social disasters".

4 A number of different definitions are used by various organisations and governments to define refugees. The most universally accepted international legal definition of a refugee is that included in the United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, July 28, 1951, and extended in the Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, 31 January 1967, which states that a refugee is a person who "owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality,
total number of people of concern to UNHCR—refugees, returnees, asylum-seekers, internally displaced persons and others of concern—increased slightly during the year to 22.3 million, while there was a twenty-one per cent increase in the number of asylum applications in the leading industrial countries (UNHCR, 2000). However, the United States Committee for Refugees (USCR)—another major source of refugee data—claimed that the number of refugees increased by 600,000 during 1999—the first major increase in seven years—and that seven million people were forced to flee their homes (USCR, 2000). They estimated that the world’s internally displaced population had swollen to more than 21 million, compared to between 13 and 14 million at the beginning of the decade. Major refugee problems continued to break out throughout the year, such as those displacements in Kosova and Chechyna, while older crises continued to generate refugee movements out of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Afghanistan, Burundi, the Republic of the Congo and Sudan to name a few.

and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country” (UNHCR, 1999). However, even the UNHCR, a primary source for refugee statistics, “uses different definitions to serve different groups, and by extension, to collect data on these groups” (Reed, Haaga and Keely 1998:4). For example, the UNHCR does not include forced migrants who come under the mandate of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine refugees in the Near East (Reed et al., 1998:4-5).

According to the UNHCR, refugees may include:

a) persons recognized as refugees by Governments having ratified the 1951 and/or 1967 Protocol;
b) persons recognized as refugees under the 1969 Organisation for African Unity (OAU) Convention and the principles of the Cartagena Declaration;
c) persons recognized by UNHCR as refugees in accordance with its Statute (“mandate” refugees):
d) persons who have been granted temporary protection on a group basis (Reed et al., 1998:4-5).

USCR uses a different definition than UNHCR in the collection of its data. It has two categories of people in need of protection and/or assistance: refugees, who are unwilling or unable to return to their home countries because they fear persecution or violence there; and asylum-seekers, who claim to that they are refugees (USCR cited in Reed et al., 1998:5).

In April 1999, approximately 700,000 refugees fled from ethnic-cleansing in Kosova into the neighbouring countries of Albania (404,200 refugees), Macedonia (211,340) and Montenegro (61,700), while 26,586 were evacuated to third, principally European, countries (UNHCR cited in United States Agency for International Development, 1999). In October 1999, a Russian military campaign in Chechyna caused more than 200,000 refugees to flee the country, mostly to Ingushetia (UNHCR, 1999). Other major refugee emergencies included the exodus of 136,000 people from the Democratic Republic of the Congo into neighbouring countries, 93,000 people from Afghanistan,
The arrival of successive waves of predominately Iran, Iraqi and Afghan asylum-seekers in Australian territory in November 1999 caused headlines in Australian and international media. The extent of these arrivals—which were accompanied by dire predictions that numbers would escalate dramatically the following year—led to changes in refugee entitlements in Australia. This inflow of large numbers of boat people has some similarities to the exodus of boat people fleeing Vietnam between 1975 and 1996.

**The Vietnamese Refugee Exodus**

One of the most significant components of the global refugee problem over the last twenty-five years was the Vietnamese refugee crisis, which saw more than one million people flee Vietnam. Although this exodus was not the greatest refugee displacement in numerical terms, it had a significant impact on national, regional and international refugee policy.

The Vietnamese refugee migration was also one of the few examples where all three durable solutions—resettlement, repatriation and settlement—were used in

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64,000 people from Burundi, 60,000 people from the Republic of the Congo and 51,000 people from Sudan (UNHCR, 1999).

More than 1,000 illegal immigrants arrived in Australia seeking asylum during November 1999 (Latest arrivals stretch detention facilities, 1999:1). Intelligence reports claimed that 10,000 illegal immigrants would make their way to Australia during the 1999/2000 financial year (Donnan, 1999).

Unauthorised arrivals seeking the protection of Australia have access to the Temporary Protection Visa, which is valid for three years, and are not eligible for the Permanent Visa initially. Holders of a Temporary Protection visa have work rights and access to special benefits as needed and are able to gain access to Medicare. They do not have access to family reunion. If the holder of a Temporary Protection Visa chooses to leave Australia, the temporary visa will cease and they will have no automatic right of return to Australia (DIMA, 2000).

The exact number of persons who fled Vietnam is impossible to determine due to the large number who perished at sea, or were abducted and/or killed by pirates. It is accurately estimated that 1,329,585 persons arrived in asylum countries between 1975 and 1996. Estimates on the number of persons who have fled Vietnam vary between one and more than two million. Coughlan (1996, Personal communication) claimed that the figure is closer to 2.5 million if estimated deaths at sea are included.

“A durable solution means the integration of refugees into society: either reintegration into their homeland after voluntary repatriation or integration into the country of asylum if settlement is allowed or into a third country through resettlement” (Stein, 1986a:265).
addressing the refugee problem. However, it was the resettlement option that has been the major strategy, with 754,253 refugees resettled, while 72,244 persons were voluntarily returned to Vietnam (UNHCR, 1995c:58). The UNHCR (cited in Suhrke, 1998:405) labelled the Vietnamese refugee situation as unique, because “for the first, and so far last, time in modern history a large refugee population was systematically resettled from a developing country to industrialised states”. This, according to Suhrke (1995:137), was “an aberration not likely to be repeated”.

The Vietnamese refugee situation became even more distinctive from 1989, when Vietnamese asylum-seekers arriving in East and South East Asian countries were required to undergo screening procedures to establish their refugee status. Those persons who failed to establish their refugee status were rejected for resettlement to the West, and were expected to repatriate to Vietnam. This changed forever the concept that persons fleeing apparent persecution—especially from a communist country—would automatically be granted refugee status.

Vietnamese refugee resettlement changed the nature of Australia’s immigration program. The Vietnamese refugee situation prompted Australia to implement, for the first time, a formal refugee policy in 1977. Australia recognised a “humanitarian commitment and responsibility” to admit refugees for settlement and to assist them after arrival (Kumin, 1987:160). Almost 100,000 Vietnamese refugees have resettled to Australia under this scheme since 1975, thereby changing the structure of the Australian population.

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11 In addition some 400,000 persons have travelled directly from Vietnam to Western countries (mainly the United States of America) under the Orderly Departure Program (ODP).
12 Screening procedures commenced in Hong Kong in 1989 in a precursor to the Comprehensive Plan of Action (CPA). See Chapter 3 for more details of the CPA.
13 Screening procedures were later imposed on Haitian refugees following the overthrow of Haiti’s President Aristide in September 1991. Haitian refugees intercepted by the U.S. Coast Guard en route to the United States of America were screened for refugee claims aboard the Coast Guard vessels or at the U.S. naval base at Guantánamo, Cuba (Frelick, 1996:375).
14 The immigration of Vietnamese refugees was the first major stream of Asian immigration into Australia since the influx of Chinese immigrants during the nineteenth century. Vietnam established itself and has remained one of the major source countries for immigrants—initially refugees but
significant impact on other government policies—following the final abolition of the White Australia Policy and coinciding with the introduction of Multiculturalism.

**THE SCARCITY OF REFUGEE RESEARCH**

Despite the increasing frequency of refugee movements over the last twenty-five years, little progress has been made towards understanding refugee movements. Baker (1983:9–10) questioned why “such a major international problem has remained so seriously neglected”. Harrell-Bond (1988:1) also questioned why forced migration has been a subject neglected by academics. A lack of understanding of refugee movements and problems was identified earlier by Liu, Lamanna and Murata (1979:1), who criticised the notion that refugee movements were unpredictable and nonrepetitive events, and claimed that this belief had resulted in the “failure to systematically analyse and accumulate past experience for future use”. Stein (1981:320), Stein and Tomasi (1981:5) and Chan (1987:174; 1990a:4) have all been critical of this traditional view of refugee movements as isolated, localised, sporadic, transitory and non-recurring events. Stein (1981:320) claimed that this inaccurate perception of refugee events has led to an “incompleteness, things left undone, a failure to evaluate programs, to prepare for the next wave of refugees, to experiment with alternative strategies, to develop coordination, to undertake research and to learn from the past”. This viewpoint is

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15 The “White Australia” policy dates back to the 1850s, when the colonies of Victoria and New South Wales introduced restrictions on Chinese immigration following violent outbreaks against Chinese miners by other miners in the two colonies. Upon Federation, the Federal government passed the *Immigration Restriction Act 1901*, which placed restrictions on immigration into the country. The abolition of the “White Australia” policy commenced in March 1966 with the expansion of non-European migration. The Whitlam (Labor) government in 1973 implemented further steps at abolishing race from immigration policies, although reductions in overall immigration intake meant there was little impact on the number of immigrants from non-European countries. The number and percentage of migrants only increased following the Fraser government coming to office in late 1975 (Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, 1999b).
supported by Chan (1990a:4), who argued that the perception of the refugee phenomenon as a temporary event has been a major factor in the narrow focus of refugee research. To overcome the deficiencies in refugee research, Stein and Tomasi (1981:6–7) detailed a set of objectives that researchers needed to address. They called for new research on refugees to:

- provoke new thinking and promote a comprehensive, historical, interdisciplinary and comparative perspective which focuses on the consistencies and patterns in the refugee experience. Ideally, such work should build the foundations of a new field of Refugee Studies, clarify concepts, formulate the questions to be addressed more precisely and define the parameters and priorities of such studies. The ultimate objective must be the development of a new body of knowledge, the catalogue and evaluation of existing programs, and, perhaps most importantly, the establishment of an institutional memory for policy makers and operational personnel. (Stein and Tomasi, 1981:6–7)

Unfortunately, Van Hear (1998:341) reported nearly two decades later that these objectives had not yet been met and that refugee studies have become increasingly diffuse as time goes on.

There is a consensus among refugee specialists that there has been a lack of substantive research conducted on refugee movements, particularly by social scientists. Baker (1983:9) accused social scientists, as well as other refugee specialists, as being responsible for the lack of “systematic and cumulative research into the refugee experience.” This is supported by Bulcha (1988:77), who noted that “refugee problems have, so far, attracted limited interest from social scientists”. Hugo (1987:251–252) was more specific in his criticism, noting that research on involuntary migrations in South East Asia has been “a neglected area of research among social scientists”.

There appear to be numerous reasons for the dearth of research on refugee migrations by social scientists. Chan (1990a:4) postulated that one possible explanation

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In addition, Baker (1983:9) also claimed policy makers, social planners, politicians, administrators, agency directors (statutory and voluntary) and workers in the field were responsible for the dearth of refugee research.
is that refugee studies may be deemed “outside the domain of normal science”. He also claimed that refugee studies has failed to captivate the interest of established social scientists or their young counterparts, and was not considered a suitable path to developing an academic career. Shackgrove (cited in Robinson, 1990:6) supports this view, claiming that accepting an academic post in the field of refugee studies was often perceived as a dubious move. This view is also supported by Baker (1983:vii), who argued that there is “little kudos” attached to studying refugee migrations. He noted that studies on refugees have failed to attract many research grants, and consequently were not considered useful for promotional purposes within academia. Baker (1983:vii) also questioned whether refugee migration was too difficult a field to research as it involves “a multidisciplinary approach which academics tend to dislike”. The academic neglect of refugee problems was explained by Stein and Tomasi (1981:6) as being the result of refugee research not fitting neatly into distinct categories and not being a ready made field of study. They claimed that it lacked “standard texts, a theoretical structure, a systematic body of data, and even a firm definition of the subject or the field. Generally there has been a failure to learn from experience and to add to the cumulative body of knowledge on references.” Other commentators such as Carpenter (1982:42), Zetter (1988a:3) and Harrell-Bond (1988:1) all stated that refugee situations have been dominated by priorities for physical survival and humanitarian assistance, policy analysis, project appraisal, and program evaluation. While important areas of investigation, the consequence has been a neglect of data collection and research on refugee populations.

A major criticism of many studies on refugee movements is that they have been fragmentary and dealt primarily with one aspect of the refugee experience, such as the provision of asylum and protection; assimilation and integration; or government policies (Bulcha, 1988:77). For example, Chan and Christie (1995:82–83) noted that the literature on Indochinese refugees primarily centred on “the immediate psychosocial and economic adaptation during the initial phases of resettlement and adjustment in host
societies”. This concentration of research on one aspect of the refugee experience has usually been conducted in isolation and without sufficient knowledge of the stages that preceded it. For example, the paucity of research on refugee camp life has been identified by Stein (1981:323), who claimed that the refugee camp experience “is perhaps the most poorly analyzed part of the refugee experience”. This is supported by Chan (1990a:4), who noted that there was “nothing empirically systematic or sustaining enough to merit scholarly writing” on refugee camps.

Leading refugee researchers such as Baker (1990:68), Bulcha (1988:77) and Stein (1981:321) have all called for a holistic perspective on refugee movements, where studies combine all flight and settlement phases. Stein (1981:321) stressed that to find the answers to the problems of refugee movements, researchers must investigate all the stages of the refugee experience. This was supported by Baker (1990:68), who argued that properly conducted multidisciplinary research is required on all stages to determine what are the unique and common factors of the refugee experience. He added that to develop the most appropriate policies, practices and resources to assist present and future refugees, researchers must conduct diligent and systematic research into past and present refugee migrations, with refugees encouraged to communicate their impressions and interpretations of the reality of what they have gone, and are still going, through.

The first meeting of the International Research and Advisory Panel on Refugees and Other Displaced Persons, held in Oxford in January 1990, called for “more and different research” to be conducted on refugees “through the application of innovative and varied methodologies” (Robinson, 1990:13). Hugo (1987:251) previously called for more innovative, flexible and appropriate research strategies to be adopted, while Stein and Tomasi (1981:6) called for “research reflecting both fresh thinking and comprehensive interdisciplinary, comparative and historical perspectives”.

One of the major issues identified by Zetter (1988b:101–103) was for future research to examine the different stages of the refugee experience. He argued that research is required on all aspects of the refugee experience, from the root causes for the
mass exodus of people, together with the traumatic and often tragic experiences suffered en route. Beyond these initiating factors, studies should be made of the dynamics of refugee communities, especially their behaviours both upon reaching asylum and upon resettlement, as well as the conduct of host communities towards the refugees. Conditions of adaptation, development and change given new or substantially unfamiliar surroundings, need to be analysed to understand the processes, barriers and problems of refugee adjustment (Zetter, 1988b:101–103).

The overall aim of this study was to conduct research on all aspects of the Vietnamese refugee migration since the introduction of the Comprehensive Plan of Action in 1989, thereby addressing some of the inadequacies that had been identified in previous refugee research. To accomplish this, it was first necessary to identify the stages in the Vietnamese refugee experience.

THE STAGES OF REFUGEE MIGRATION

The concept that the refugee experience could be divided into different stages was first proposed by Stephen Keller (1975), and has subsequently been adapted by various other researchers, including Liu et al. (1979), Baker (1983), Hosking (1990) and Ager (1999). Keller’s (1975) original research was based on the refugee flows that followed the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947. He divided refugee migration into three stages: reaction to threat; extreme danger and flight; and resettlement and return to normal life. Within these three broad stages he identified the nine stages of refugeeism as:

The Early Stage: Reaction to Threat

1. The period of threat. This is the initial stage when the victim recognises and assesses the threat. Keller (1975:42–43) noted that individuals perceived threat at different times and reacted in different ways.
2. **The decision to flee.** Eventually, the refugee decides to flee. This was frequently triggered by a “brush with death” or the realisation that there could be no return to “pre-threat life” and that their lives were in danger (Keller, 1975:43).

**The Middle Stage: Extreme Danger and Flight**

3. **Extreme danger and flight.** Escape from the intolerable situation, however, does not bring relief. Keller (1975:50–54) distinguished refugeeism from natural disaster, because the latter is generally a single event in one location, whereas the former can be a series of dangerous episodes at different locations i.e. while fleeing. Flight involves risks and stresses at each step of the journey, and refugees react differently to these dangers. Keller (1975:97) claimed that at this stage the refugee saw him/herself “as a target for the wrath of the world, abandoned by all who might save him/her”.

4. **Reaching safety.** Upon arriving in a place of safety the refugee feels that they have arrived in the Promised Land. There were various options available to refugees upon reaching safety: living in the camps, living with relatives, or self-settlement. An adaptive mechanism emerged among many of the refugees upon reaching safety, particularly in the refugee camps, which is known as “D.P. apathy, a withdrawal from all the stimuli that could cause anxiety and/or guilt” (Keller, 1975:64).

5. **Camp behaviour.** Keller (1975:59) claimed that life in the overcrowded camps was “a dreadful experience for the refugees”. Many of the camp populations suffered emotionally from the traumas of dislocation. In addition, they were preyed upon by criminal elements within the camps. The horrors of the camp led refugees to flee the camps as quickly as possible.
The Late Stages: Resettlement and Return to Normal Life

6. **Repatriation, settlement or resettlement.** There were three options available to refugees: settlement, resettlement or repatriation.\(^17\)

7. **The early and late stages of resettlement.** “Gradually the tone of normal life is restored …[and] the refugee becomes integrated into the mesh of a larger community” (Keller, 1975:81). For the next one or two years, refugees attempt to recover what has been lost and to rebuild their lives.

8. **Adjustment and acculturation.** The refugee must mobilise their resources to succeed in their new home.

9. **Residual states and changes in behaviour caused by the experience.**
   
   A number of developments occur during the resettlement phase that endure long after the refugee has reestablished him/herself—including feelings of invulnerability and guilt. The former frequently leads to risk-taking and the latter to aggressive behaviour.

Liu *et al.* (1979:10) created a five-stage model of refugee movements based on the first wave of refugees who fled Vietnam between the last week of April and the first week of May, 1975. The stages of this model included:

1. **Flight.** The displacement of refugees from their own country by events outside of their own control. Generally, the involuntary entry into refugee status is triggered by the push of fear for personal safety during crisis, when circumstances in the home country changed so dramatically that it

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\(^{17}\) Settlement occurred where the refugees continued to live where they were, as the camps were transformed into suburban settlements or self-sustaining villages. In cases where refugees stayed with relatives, they became new members of pre-existing households. Resettlement was where refugees left the camps, or relatives' homes, for new homes elsewhere. Repatriation was the return of refugees to their homeland.
was "no longer viable for the refugee to remain ... in his[her] customary round of life" (Liu et al. 1979:11).

2. **Transit.** Temporary refuge for refugees at one of five Pacific staging areas before being admitted to American mainland camps. Liu et al. (1979:82–83) argued that the interim Pacific staging area was "midway to nowhere", because the refugee had to make a decision whether (1) to migrate to the United States of America and accept sponsorship out of the camp, (2) to travel to another country, or (3) to return to Vietnam.

3. **Sojourn in camp.** The refugee camp (Camp Pemberton) in the U.S.A., was a social institution in itself, "to which the refugee had to adjust and be socialised" (Liu et al. 1979:175).

4. **Sponsorship out and subsequent resettlement.** The movement of refugees out of the camp environment to begin a "new life" in American society. Refugee sponsorship was arranged by voluntary resettlement agencies, in association with sponsors: individuals, churches, civic organisations, state and local governments, and other organisations.

5. **Long-term adjustment.** Mainly focused on the problems encountered by refugees in their early resettlement in America, but also examined factors that ultimately facilitated their successful resettlement.  

A more comprehensive, and seemingly more appropriate, eight-stage process model of the refugee experience was proposed by Baker (1983:5–10), based on earlier research, personal testimonies, clinical experience, research data and his personal

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18 A staging camp was initially established on the island of Guam, with additional camps subsequently set up on Wake Island, Subic Bay (U.S. Naval Base in the Philippines), Clark (U.S. Air Force Base in the Philippines) and Hickam Field (U.S. Air Force Base in Hawaii).

19 Major obstacles included their lack of permanent resident alien status, employment and underemployment, low pay, dispersal of family, limitations with home occupancy, poor social networks, etc. (Liu et al. 1979:169–170).
experiences as a refugee. Although Baker (1983:5) identified eight stages, he stated that the process could be truncated at any of these stages. The stages he identified were:

1. **The Period of Threat.** The first stage is when a person becomes aware that they, or other group members, are being persecuted. In extreme cases, persons may be tortured or even killed. The prospective refugees are increasingly subjected to dehumanising behaviour, either directly by government policy or indirectly through the actions of officials, organisations or the public. During this period both the individual's human rights and citizen rights are threatened.

2. **Decision to Flee.** Eventually, the dehumanising behaviour becomes intolerable and the individual seeks a solution, such as flight. The decision to flee can occur instantaneously or else be a planned affair.

3. **In Flight.** The decision to flee is followed by a period of high drama and tension, with individuals afraid of being discovered, assaulted and robbed as they await, and during, departure. During this stage, refugees become highly conscious of the "obstacles and constraints that could prevent them reaching a place of asylum" (Baker, 1983:6).

4. **Reaching Safety and a Place of Asylum.** An individual can be subjected to a myriad of personal reactions—such as exhilaration, depression, exhaustion, guilt and shame, fear of being returned, anger, etc.—upon reaching safety. These feelings add to the confusion of arriving in a new environment.

5. **Refugee Camp Experience.** Refugees experience "primary culture shock" as they recognise how different their new environment is. In

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Obstacles/constraints to reaching asylum include language barriers, out of date or no passport, slower or handicapped family members, no "tradable" resources, fear of personal breakdown from the stress of flight, and being forced into deviant behaviour to survive e.g. stealing, killing (Baker, 1983:6).
addition, they have to adjust to their lost identity, role changes, and feelings of loss. They are often hampered during this stage by communication problems and the inability to make their needs known. The psychological and social state of refugees is greatly influenced by the duration of time spent in a refugee camp. The experience can become more traumatic as they watch fellow refugees resettle, while they are rejected.

6. **Reception into a Host Country.** Their experience of arriving in the resettlement country might be called "secondary culture shock", as they encounter new "climate, food, language, dress, social and family relationships, approaches to health care and education" that are different to those experienced in their homeland and the refugee camp (Brown cited in Baker, 1983:6). The refugees are culturally alienated at every level. They may experience racism, inability to obtain employment, and dehumanisation that can lead to serious depression and even suicide.

7. **Resettlement.** Resettlement is a complex concept about which there is much confusion. Cox (1977) defined four phases of resettlement: the honeymoon phase, the disenchantment phase, a beginning resolution phase and an effective functioning phase. The four phases are all fraught with stress and require "massive adaptive and coping responses from the refugee" (Baker, 1983:7). The phases are all influenced by a variety of factors, both external and internal.

8. **Post-Resettlement.** The final stage of the refugee experience is when "the person has his/her own home, a job, can speak the language, and is reasonably settled" (Baker, 1983:8).

While there are significant similarities between these three different approaches to the stages of refugee migration, it was not evident which, if any, of the models was most appropriate for explaining the migration of Vietnamese refugees under the
Comprehensive Plan of Action. Consequently, it was necessary to undertake an extensive field work investigation to determine what stages were comprised in this Vietnamese refugee experience, using the earlier approaches as a foundation.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The principal goal of this research is to develop a stages approach that is appropriate for explaining the migration of Vietnamese refugees under the Comprehensive Plan of Action. The study aims to investigate the common experiences of refugees within these different stages and how refugees transferred from one stage to the next. Importantly, this research aims to explain much of the refugee experience from the refugees' perspective.

Adopting the major principles proposed by Richmond (1988:7) as necessary components for a theory of international migration, the study will explain the scale, patterns, and composition of refugee movements, the factors that influenced the decision to flee and particular choice of destination. In addition, conditions in the camps of East and South East Asia, the refugee determination process, the selection process for resettlement, and, where possible, the process of resettlement to Australia will also be explained. The study will detail the roles played by camp bureaucracies, governments and non-government agencies throughout the refugee experience.

As part of the overall goal, there are seven specific objectives that the study plans to achieve:

1. To determine the underlying reasons why the refugees left Vietnam.
2. Obtain details of the flight characteristics of Vietnamese refugees.
3. To seek information on the policies of the asylum-giving nations of South East and East Asia in relation to Vietnamese refugees, as well as the resettlement providing nations of the West, under the Comprehensive Plan of Action (CPA).
4. To investigate the asylum period of the refugee experience—between flight and resettlement—and determine the importance of this stage in the life of the refugee, and in their future.

5. To examine the screening procedures conducted as part of the CPA.

6. To determine how refugees were selected for resettlement to Australia.

7. To determine the major problems facing Vietnamese refugees during their initial resettlement to Australia.

THESIS OUTLINE

Any examination of the migration of refugees out of Vietnam must commence with a summary of the events that led to this mass exodus. Chapter 2 is a historical examination of involuntary migration by the Vietnamese, from the earliest recorded movements (18th century) through to the events of the First Indochina War (1945–1954) and the Second Indochina War (1954–1975). It also examines forced migration within Vietnam following reunification in 1975, including government resettlement programs, together with population displacement generated from the Third Indochina Conflict (1978–1979) and the Sino-Vietnamese Conflict (1979).

The emphasis of the third chapter is the examination of the refugee exodus that emanated out of Vietnam from 1975. It investigates the scales, patterns and composition of different waves of refugees who fled the country during the past twenty-five years, such as the anticipatory refugees of 1975, the second wave of 1976–1978, the ethnic Chinese wave of 1979, the 1980-1988 wave and the post CPA wave since 1989. It examines the organisation of escapes in these early years, including the involvement of the Vietnamese government in the exodus. The research looks at the refugee flows to the different asylum countries, and the major refugee policies that have been initiated by each asylum country over time, and how these have affected the refugees. A major component in this section is an examination of the Comprehensive Plan of Action that
was initiated in 1989 to solve the continuing Vietnamese refugee problem. It is under the conditions of the CPA that this research on Vietnamese refugees was conducted.

The fourth of the thesis chapters is devoted to the research methodology. It details why the Philippines was chosen as a field work location, and describes the Philippines Refugee Processing Center (PRPC)\(^\text{21}\) and the Regional Resettlement Transit Center (RRTC) at Morong, Bataan where field work was undertaken. The second part of the chapter concentrates on the methodological approaches that were actually used during the field work period in the Philippines. It then goes on to describe the refugee population at the Regional Resettlement Transit Center and the sample refugee population. The final section of the chapter describes the follow-up field work that was undertaken in Australia in early 1995.

Chapter 5 investigates the first three stages of the refugee experience: conditions in Vietnam, the decision to flee and flight. An analysis of the data obtained during the survey of refugees, together with information obtained from the literature, is used to examine the reasons why refugees fled Vietnam. The study found that ethnic discrimination, imprisonment in reeducation camps, transfers to new economic zones, and family backgrounds (pre-1975 family history) were all major factors in people deciding to escape. The chapter then provides some details of successful escape attempts to the Philippines and Hong Kong.

The focus of Chapter 6 is the arrival of refugees in either the Philippines or Hong Kong. It reconstructs the refugee experience in the first asylum camp and provides details of the Philippines First Asylum Camp (PFAC) and a number of the detention centres in Hong Kong. Furthermore, it examines the refugee status determination (screening) process that refugees underwent in the asylum camps/detention centres, which was the key to the refugees' passage to the next stage.

\(^\text{21}\) This thesis has retained the Philippine (and American) spelling of centre—center—in the name of their institutions.
Chapter 7 examines the refugee experience in the transit camp at the Regional Resettlement Transit Center (RRTC) at Bataan in the Philippines. It examines the structure and facilities of the camp from the refugees’ perspectives—what the refugees thought about the camp, and the personnel and organisations within it. This section also details the processes involved in obtaining resettlement, and details how the refugees were selected for resettlement to Australia. The study examines the roles played by various organisations ("shepherds" and "gatekeepers") in the refugees’ path to a paradise country.

An introduction to the resettlement stage of the refugee experience is provided in Chapter 8. The chapter focuses on the early resettlement stage, examining the first year of resettlement in Australia for a small cohort of refugees. It looks at how the refugees spent their first year in Australia, such as obtaining employment or undertaking education or job training and investigates the major problems that refugees encounter during their first year of resettlement.

The final chapter examines previous refugee migration stage models, such as those proposed by Keller (1975), Liu et al. (1979) and Baker (1983), and determines that they are not appropriate for explaining Vietnamese refugee migration to Australia in the 1990s. The research develops a new stages approach to refugee migration that is appropriate to post-CPA Vietnamese refugee migration. It also examines whether this new approach would be suitable for explaining other refugee migrations, and uses the recent influx of asylum-seekers to Australia as an example. The final section of the thesis identifies areas of refugee migration that require further research and problems in the management and processing of Vietnamese refugees.
ANTECEDENTS OF INVOLUNTARY MIGRATION IN VIETNAM

To understand the exodus of refugees out of Vietnam since 1975 it is pertinent to first examine the history of population movements, particularly involuntary displacements, both within and out of Vietnam. This examination will show that there is a tradition of migration—both voluntarily and involuntarily—among the Vietnamese. What follows in no way professes to be an exhaustive study of this subject, but rather an introduction to the long history and variety of displacements that have occurred.

The Vietnamese tradition of migration has continued for more than two thousand years, ever since several clan tribes living in southern China—known as the Viets—resisted Chinese assimilation pressures and migrated south to settle on the plains of the Red River Delta around 500 BC (Pike, 1966:2). One generation after another left their
ancestral tombs and fought their way further south from the northern plains. These migrations—which were under the supervision of the emperor and his court—were described by Pike (1966:4) as "a series of leapfrog moves" involving both voluntary and forced departures from more populous and settled areas to establish "commercially viable and physically secure" villages further south. This advance to the south is claimed by Osborne (1969:13) to be "one of the most distinctive facets of Vietnamese history". This southward drive was, on the one hand, propelled by population pressures and political and military unrest at home, while on the other it was drawn by the availability of land and political and military power vacuums on the frontier (Cotter, 1968:23).

By the late fifteenth century the Vietnamese had defeated the once powerful Champa kingdom of central Vietnam, causing thousands of Chams to flee south and west into Khmer territory. The southward advance—Nam-tien—continued into the fertile plains of the Mekong Delta, which was then Cambodian territory.1 In 1698 a viceroyalty (kinh-luoc) was established over the provinces around present day Ho Chi Minh City (Figure 2.1). Once the lower Mekong Delta was occupied, Vietnam turned its attention westward, and engulfed more Khmer territory, finally reaching the Gulf of Siam at Ha Tien in 1714 (Fall, 1959:54).2 By 1780 the Vietnamese controlled most of the land within the present boundaries. During the period that followed, until French colonization of Cambodia in 1863, there were frequent Vietnamese incursions into Khmer territory, as the Cambodian rulers played the Vietnamese and the Thai off against each other.3

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1 Nearly all of what became known as Cochin China, or the southern half of the former South Vietnam, was previously Khmer territory and inhabited only by Cambodians (Herz, 1958:42).

2 The Vietnamese used the alleged mistreatment of Vietnamese colonists in the Mekong Delta as a pretext for their continued expansion.

3 A product of these incursions, particularly during the early nineteenth century, was the increased migration of Vietnamese to, and settlement in, Cambodia. Vietnamese, and latter French, authorities actively encouraged the Vietnamese people, and also Chinese migrants, to settle in Cambodia. Vietnamese colonization of Khmer territory frequently involved expelling or harassing Cambodian
Chinese influence in Vietnam did not end with the Viets’ exodus from China. The Chinese have played a continuous role in Vietnamese history, including more than a thousand years as rulers of Vietnam. Vietnam’s geographical proximity to China (Figure 2.1) attracted large-scale migration of Chinese, and Vietnam became one of the main recipients of Chinese migrants, as well as “a refuge for fugitive supporters of fallen dynasties in China” (Luong, 1963:3). However, one of the first population policies of independent Vietnam—and a precursor to policies that arose again in the twentieth century—was the expulsion of 87,000 Chinese nationals to China in the tenth century AD (Tran, 1993:15). Large numbers of Chinese also requested to remain in Vietnam and from this population—and fuelled by further immigration, particularly from the eighteenth century—the ethnic Chinese (Hoa) grew to become an important minority in Vietnam—demographically, geographically and economically.

Vietnamese have frequently sought refuge from political and social upheavals in nearby countries. For example, Prince Nguyen Anh fled into Thailand with the remnants of his army and other Vietnamese following their defeat in the Tay Son rebellion in 1795 (Poole, 1970:23). They were followed two years later by Marshal Nguyen Huynh Duc, one of the Prince’s loyal commandants, with more than 5,000 troops (Poole, 1970:24).

4 Chinese refugees (Minh-huong) played an important role in the Vietnamese expansion into the south. For example, refugees fleeing the Manchu dynasty arrived in Hue at various times after 1636, and in the south around Bien Hoa and My Tho as late as 1683. In addition, Chinese settlers had an important colony at Ha Tien, and combined with the Nguyen government to divide the Khmer (Cambodian) territory (Cotter, 1968:19-20).

5 It is estimated that the Chinese population in Vietnam in 1954 was around 750,000 (Luong, 1963:6; Tran, 1993:23). By the time of reunification their numbers had reached about 1.5 million, of whom 85 per cent lived in the South. During the centuries, Chinatowns emerged in almost every main city and became important economic centres (such as Cholon, Hoi An, Ha Tien). The Chinese prospered under the French, often acting as brokers between the French and the Indochinese, and dominating transportation, wholesale trade and rice milling and active in money-lending and retail trade. The Chinese also played important roles in international commerce, investment and mining (Pike, 1966:3; Tran, 1993:13–23).
Figure 2.1

Provinces

1 An Giang
2 Bac Thai
3 Ben Tre
4 Binh Tri Thien
5 Cao Lang
6 Cua Long
7 Dac Lac
8 Dong Nai
9 Dong Thap
10 Gai Lai - Kontum
11 Ha Bac
12 Ha Nam Ninh
13 Ha Son Binh
14 Ha Tuyen
15 Hai Hung
16 Hai Phong
17 Hanoi
18 Hau Giang
19 Ho Chi Minh
20 Hoang Lien Son
21 Kien Giang
22 Lai Chau
23 Lam Dong
24 Long An
25 Minh Hai
26 Nghe Tinh
27 Nghi Binh
28 Phu Khanh
29 Quang Nam - Da Nang
30 Quang Ninh
31 Son La
32 Song Be
33 Tay Ninh
34 Thai Binh
35 Thanh Hoa
36 Thuan Hai
37 Tien Giang
38 Vinh Phu

0 100 200 km
Large numbers of Vietnamese sought asylum in Thailand during the nineteenth century. For example, a group of Vietnamese Catholics, who had been persecuted by the Vietnamese Emperor Minh-Mang, was led into Thailand by a French bishop in 1827. Further influxes of Vietnamese Catholics escaping anti-Christian persecutions fled into Thailand during the reigns of Emperors Thieu Tri (1841–1847) and Tu Duc (1848–1883). Vietnamese prisoners of war who were captured by Thai armies fighting in Cambodia and Thailand between the 1830s and the 1850s were also moved back to Thailand.

The presence of the French in Vietnam did not halt the “great underlying theme of Vietnamese history—migration towards the open frontier” (Osborne, 1969:263). There was a continual movement of Vietnamese settlers into new areas to take up agricultural land. This was evident by the slow but steady migration of Vietnamese into Cambodia throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. The French encouraged this continual seepage of Vietnamese into the regions around Ha Tien and Chau Doc, which transformed those areas into Vietnamese territory. By 1908 there were more than 60,000 Vietnamese living mainly in the southeast and riverine regions of the country and the 1921 census put the number at 150,000 people (Armer, 1994:213; Osborne, 1969:251).

The colonization of Vietnam by France had a significant impact on the migration of people both within and out of the country. Hundreds of Vietnamese nationalists sought sanctuary in Thailand from the brutalities of French imperialism towards the end of the nineteenth century (Flood, 1977:32; Poole, 1970:27). During the early twentieth century, especially between 1912 and 1945, rebellious Vietnamese nationalists fled from predominantly central Vietnam to Thailand. Bangkok then became the chief centre for

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6 French intervention in Vietnam began in 1786. However, French colonization in Vietnam did not begin until 1860 in Cochinchina—or southern Vietnam—and it was not until 1883 that the French succeeded in controlling the entire country.
political factions trying to block the French repossession of Indochina in the late Second World War period.

The French colonial regime sanctioned various illegal and brutal practices to forcibly recruit hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese to labour for public works construction, plantations and mines. This labour recruitment was labelled by Buttinger (1967:177) as “unbridled exploitation”, while Thompson (1968:154) has perhaps more accurately described it as “three years’ slavery”. Entire villages were stripped of men for forced labour and auxiliary troops (Buttinger, 1967:168). In 1906, French author Jean Ajalbert wrote: “This ill-disguised deportation … drain[s] entire communities for public construction work, from which only a small fraction return” (cited in Buttinger, 1967:73–74). The Vietnamese labourers had to endure abysmal conditions, including low wages, unsatisfactory food and water, diseases and brutality. A high death rate, desertion and non-renewal of contracts led to an extraordinarily high turnover rate of labourers (Marr, 1981:6–7). Working for the French was to be avoided at any cost, and thousands of villagers abandoned their homes and became vagrants rather than let themselves be recruited. Labour recruitment took on another dimension in 1915, when an army of 140,000 Vietnamese soldiers and labourers were forcibly recruited and shipped to France to fight in the First World War (Thompson, 1968:90).

France was also a favoured destination for a great number of Vietnamese students. The best of Vietnam’s graduates, and the children of rich landlords, travelled to France to be educated. The School of Medicine and Pharmacy, arguably Vietnam’s most important educational institution, required its students to go to France for their final examination.

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7 Marr (1981:6–7) claimed that the high turnover rate was evident by the fact that “hundreds of thousands” were coerced into work, even though “the rubber plantation work force never exceeded 41,000 in any one year”. Buttinger (1967:180) argued that 75,000 persons had to be imported from the north between 1925 and 1930 to maintain a maximum plantation work force of 22,000. The number of desertions increased from 847 in 1924 to 4,484 in 1928 (Buttinger, 1967:180).

8 It is difficult to determine the number of Vietnamese students in France during any period. However, Thompson (1968:298) reported that there were 300 Annamite students at universities in Paris in 1930.
After World War I there was a sizeable, and politically active, Vietnamese community in Paris. The most famous of these expatriates was Nguyen Ai Quoc—later known as Ho Chi Minh.

THE FIRST INDOCHINA WAR (1946–1954)

The return of the French forces to Indochina in 1946 caused large numbers of refugees to flee Vietnam. In addition, a substantial number of Vietnamese who had settled in Laos and Cambodia also elected to flee. Many Vietnamese living in Laos supported the Lao Issara in their struggle against the returning French forces. However, as the French recaptured territory in several operations in 1946, some 40,000–50,000 Vietnamese were driven across the Mekong River and sought refuge in Thailand (Flood, 1977:36). This concurs with Poole’s (1970:40) estimate that 46,700 Vietnamese refugees entered Thailand between 1946 and 1949.

The nine year war (1946–1954) in Vietnam between the French Corps Expeditionnaire and the Viet Minh forced large numbers of refugees to flee the country, again particularly to Thailand. It is impossible to calculate how many Vietnamese refugees sought asylum in Thailand before the French were defeated in 1954. However, Wiesner (1988:1) estimated that 55,000 persons arrived in the country between 1946 and 1948 alone. In addition, it is known that 80,000 Vietnamese registered for repatriation to North Vietnam within the first four months following the signing of the Rangoon Accord in 1959 (Poole, 1970:63–65).

There was also considerable population displacement within Vietnam throughout the First Indochina War. The first notable movement occurred in 1946,

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9 Viet Minh is the abbreviated and most commonly used name for the Viet Nam Doc Lap Dong Minh Hoi, or League for the Independence of Vietnam.

10 An agreement between the governments of Thailand and North Vietnam signed in Rangoon on 14 August 1959, provided the means for Vietnamese refugees to be voluntarily repatriated to North Vietnam. In all, some 40,000 refugees were returned under the program before Hanoi halted proceedings in August 1964 (Poole, 1970:63–65).
when the revolutionary *Viet Minh* forced many urban dwellers from Hanoi and other northern cities into rural areas, in accordance with their “burned land” policy. A second migration wave fled as fighting between the Communists and French Union forces spread over the countryside, forcing large numbers of unfortunate civilians who had lost their houses and rice fields to flee to the cities (Bui, 1959:59). The mass movement of homeless refugees towards the urban areas resulted in the population of cities such as Saigon and Hanoi increasing by “five-to-eight-fold in comparison to pre-World War II figures” (Fall, 1959:55).

The defeat of the French forces at Dien Bien Phu in May 1954 signalled the decline of French influence in northern Vietnam, and the commencement of further large-scale population movements. The “temporary” division of Vietnam under the Geneva Accords of 21 July 1954—Communist in the North and French-backed in the South—saw a dramatic escalation in the migration of people between the two Vietnams. Incorporated in the Accords was an agreement that permitted all Vietnamese to move freely to whichever side of the seventeenth parallel they wished to live within 300 days of the signing of the agreement. The official COMIGAL statistics—described by Bui (1959:60) as the “most reliable”, yet considered only “approximate” by Fall (1959:56)—placed the number of refugees who fled from the North during the Accord amnesty at 887,931. In addition to the official refugees there were also about 109,000 persons who migrated to the South of their own resources, and therefore were not included in government statistics. The remnants of the defeated army—including about 80,000 French soldiers and 120,000 Vietnamese military and their dependants—who

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11 Vietnam was temporarily divided under the Geneva Accords, pending elections in 1956. The line of division was the seventeenth parallel, although for the most part, the Ben Hai River was the physical border. The agreement to hold elections within two years was not honoured by South Vietnam and the Geneva Accords became the subject of later controversy.

12 Article 14(d) of the Geneva Agreement.

13 The Commissariat Général aux Réfugiés, which was responsible for the resettlement program, was referred to in Vietnam by its initials COMIGAL.

14 Bui (1959:60) stated there were 747,791 “regular” evacuees and 140,712 “irregulars”, but did not describe the differences between them.
had been stationed in the North at the time of the Accords were required to be redeployed below the seventeenth parallel under the terms of the Accords (Duncanson, 1968:207; Fall, 1959:55). Both Duncanson (1968:400) and Wiesner (1988:5) stated that many potential refugees in the North were discouraged from escaping by the harassment and obstructive actions of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) and the Viet Minh, together with people's fear of reprisal against remaining family.

The absence of official statistics and the considerable disparity between many of the estimates make it impossible to state exactly the number of people who migrated north under the Accords. Bui (1959:50) unrealistically claimed that "only a mere 4,358 persons of both sexes asked to leave Free Viet-Nam to go North". He claimed that most had originated in the North, but ventured to the South to work in the rubber plantations, and returned because they were homesick. In contrast, Duncanson (1968:207) estimated that the exodus north involved some 30,000 persons, whereas Fall (1966:76) claimed that 80,000 Viet Minh activists, supporters and their dependents left the South. Wiesner (1988:3) estimated that approximately 90,000 Viet Minh and 40,000 dependents relocated to the North by sea, with another 4,000 migrating by other means, despite active discouragement against migration by the DRV government. The smaller northward flow of refugees was interpreted by some in the West, according to Murti (1964:82), as a deliberate policy of the People's Army of Vietnam leaving their supporters and agents in the South for subversive purposes. Duncanson (1968:206) also noted that, in addition to the movement of refugees, there were large numbers of peasants returning to the villages from which they had earlier fled following bombardment, terrorist outrages or intimidation at the hands of the Viet Minh or one of the counter-revolutionary sects. 15

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15 A number of "counter-revolutionary" religious sects operated in Vietnam, the most powerful of which were the Hoa Hao and the Cao Dai, which had supported the French. These two sects were—and remain—located primarily in the Mekong Delta area of southern Vietnam.
The signing of the Geneva Accords did not bring a period of peace for the two Vietnams. Instead, the Accords signalled the end of one war and the beginnings of another longer, and even bloodier, war.

THE SECOND INDOCHINA WAR (1954–1975)

Twenty-one years of fighting in the Second Indochina War had a devastating impact on the Vietnamese, with few people on either side of the seventeenth parallel unaffected by the fighting. As most of the fighting was concentrated south of the dividing line, it is not surprising to find that civilian war casualties were most severe in South Vietnam—estimated at more than a quarter of a million people killed, and over 900,000 wounded. Furthermore, approximately eleven million people—more than half of the country’s population—were displaced by the fighting (Wiesner, 1988:346–347). In North Vietnam, more than 65,000 people died from bombing, and hundreds of thousands were injured, together with millions of people displaced, some by the actions of their own government, but most by war (Olson, 1988:67; Wiesner, 1988:344).

The DRV government implemented a resettlement program between 1960 and 1965 to transfer one million people from the overcrowded coastal plains and delta to the less densely populated and underdeveloped areas in the mountain and plateau regions. Although the two principal objectives were to reduce population densities in the coastal and delta provinces and populate upland areas, there were a number of secondary reasons, such as to strengthen control and security in rural areas populated by ethnic minorities,\(^{16}\) open up previously uncultivated land (thereby increasing food production), and providing new foci for rural industrial self-sufficiency. In addition, increasing agricultural production away from the Red River Delta was also some insurance against

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\(^{16}\) The DRV was concerned with a variety of security issues in the mountain and plateau regions, including subversion among local ethnic populations, "enemy" infiltration via the Lao-Vietnamese border, and security along the border with China.
the destruction of the dyke system in the Delta. Although there was some reluctance among both rural and urban people to resettle to the sparsely populated highlands, which were considered primitive and dangerous, intensive propaganda and other less voluntary methods were adopted to encourage the people to move (Van Dyke, 1972:126; Wiesner, 1988:301). By the end of the first Five Year Plan (1961–1965), several hundred new agricultural cooperatives had been established and more than 100,000 hectares of virgin land had been cleared, and nearly one million persons resettled (Duiker, 1989:15).

A number of resettlement schemes were implemented in South Vietnam by Ngo Dinh Diem’s regime between 1955 and 1963. These pacification programs—including land development, highlander resettlement, agrovilles, strategic hamlets and refugee villages—displaced some 1.3 million people, the great majority of whom moved unwillingly. These programs were generally ill-conceived and poorly planned attempts to increase security through the forced relocation of vulnerable populations, and generally did no more than alienate the people who were resettled. Few people wanted to live in these strategic hamlets because of the atrocious conditions, and most villagers returned to their ancestral homes within months or even weeks (Wintle, 1991:110).

The refugee situation in South Vietnam became critical from late 1964, as the number displaced escalated due to increased fighting and natural disasters such as floods.

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17 The South Vietnam government implemented a number of different settlement schemes to improve internal security during the Second Indochina War. The Agroville Plan was developed in response to the problem of rural subversion and guerrilla activities in 1958 and 1959. It aimed to alleviate insecurity by regrouping the population to self-contained and protected communities in areas that could be adequately controlled, thus cutting off the sources of Viet Cong support in the countryside. It was proposed to resettle more than half a million people into eighty central agrovilles (khu tru mat) between 1960 and 1963, although these targets were never achieved (Zasloff, 1962:331). With Viet Cong subversion increasing in intensity in late 1961, the agroville program was replaced by the strategic hamlet program as the mainstay of the counter-insurgency program. The strategic hamlet initiative placed “tactical” hamlets in areas of strategic importance. The hamlets were either developed from existing settlements and then fortified, or constructed as new fortified hamlets, and generally contained more than a thousand people. (For a detailed discussion of the strategic hamlet program see Osborne, 1965.) Ngo Dinh Diem’s government also attempted to construct a ring of refugee villages, housing North Vietnamese Catholics, around Saigon in order to protect the capital from any potential major communist advances.
and typhoons that struck that year. The Viet Cong pursued a strategy of pushing anti-Communist refugees, particularly Catholics, out of the land development centres and other villages into the towns and the cities, thereby ridding themselves of a hostile element and overwhelming the southern government's capacity to assist refugees (Wiesner, 1988:59). More than half a million people were displaced in the first half of 1965, of whom 145,000 were resettled, 13,105 were either self-sufficient or cared for by families, and 371,895 were receiving aid (Wiesner, 1988:75).

Another element that contributed to the increased number of refugees was the escalation in the American war effort in 1965. Wiesner (1988:349) argued that the American involvement not only radically changed the character of the war, but also the manner in which most people were displaced, as the American "search-and-destroy strategy and the massive and indiscriminate use of firepower in populated areas inflicted terrible destruction upon the people and their property". As a result, the leading generator of refugees was no longer escaping from Communist oppression, but from artillery, bombing and allied troop ground sweeps. This view is supported by the study conducted by Goodman and Franks (1975:205), which found that sixty-three per cent of all refugee migrations to Saigon between 1967 and 1968 were related directly to the war. Most notable had been the increase (from 1964–1966 figures) in "military action in home area" and "damage/destruction of home/village" as reasons for flight (twenty-

18 During the Second Indochina War, persons displaced because of the fighting were generally referred to as refugees. Although this does not coincide with the contemporary UNHCR definition of refugees—that requires persons to cross an international border—the term has been retained in this section of the research.

19 The universally accepted term Viet Cong was coined by Ngo Dinh Diem in the mid-1950s—from Viet-nam Cong-san meaning Vietnamese communists—to replace the term Viet Minh (see footnote 4). It was originally used during the mid-to late 1950s by the South Vietnamese press to refer to the DRV government (i.e. North Vietnamese) officials, party cadres and other supporters. However, as the insurgency in the South increased in intensity, the Diem government began referring to members of the wartime resistance who did not support their regime as Viet Cong. Under this usage, it only referred to southerners, while DRV officials, Viet-Nam Workers' Party cadres and members of the People's Army of Viet-Nam were dubbed "North Vietnamese" (Buttinger, 1967:172; Thayer, 1989:xxix).

one and twenty-two per cent respectively), while migration due to “VC [Viet Cong] harassment” had decreased by more than half to only ten per cent. Le, Rambo and Murfin (1976:860) found “fear of Viet Cong reprisals” and “fear of fighting shelling and bombing” were the two most frequently cited reasons for fleeing, followed by “saw others leaving, and panic” and “unwillingness to live under Communist control”.21

Another consequence of the fighting was the sharp increase in the urban population of South Vietnam. There was considerable migration of refugees to the major towns, driven from the rural areas by fighting, bombing or defoliation, or attracted by the bright lights of the cities. The proportion of South Vietnam’s population living in urban areas increased from sixteen per cent in 1958 to forty-three per cent by 1975, with the population of Saigon increasing from less than one million to over four million in the same period (Desbarats, 1987b:46; Duiker, 1989:12). Karnow (1983:439) argued that the influx of refugees into the cities, known as “forced urbanisation”, was deliberately induced by American strategists to deny peasant support to the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong by reducing the population base.

The increased American military activity against North Vietnam from 1965, particularly the bombing raids against the cities, also had a significant impact on the North’s urban population. In order to reduce potential casualties, the North Vietnamese government ordered all non-essential personnel, mainly children and the aged, to be evacuated from the major cities to rural villages. However, the policy was not strictly enforced until the government ordered the evacuation of Hanoi in mid-1966, when ten thousand people left the capital every day, and between one-third and three-quarters of the city’s one million inhabitants were relocated (Van Dyke, 1972:128). After the American decision to cease bombing in the North in 1968, many people filtered back to the cities, but when the raids resumed again in 1972 they were evacuated again.

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21 The study by Le, Rambo and Murfin (1976) consisted of systematic interviewing of seventy refugee family heads in three relocation centres—two government-run centres and a third run by a Catholic relief agency—in April 1975.
In 1967, American forces reintroduced the planned, and frequently forced, mass relocation of population into South Vietnamese controlled territory, in order to deny the enemy access to the populace, and making their previous homelands free fire zones (Wiesner, 1988:127). 22 One of the more notable resettlement programs was the evacuation of about 12,000 people and their possessions—including livestock, house frames and furniture—from the southern side of the Demilitarised Zone (DMZ)23 in order to turn it into a free fire zone. The people were moved to a relocation site near the village of Cam-Lo, screened by security forces, and registered as refugees to obtain temporary relief (Wiesner, 1988:133).

The situation in the South deteriorated considerably from 1968, commencing with the Tet24 offensive on January 30–31, when Viet Cong and North Vietnam Army (NVA) forces launched a major offensive against one hundred South Vietnamese towns and cities, displacing 892,454 registered war victims. Although the Viet Cong forces were decimated, this is considered the turning point in the war. In addition, the American public was shocked by street fighting in Saigon—particularly in the grounds of the U.S. Embassy—and opinion turned against the war. This was followed by the May offensives, when communist forces again attacked a number of southern towns and cities—in particular Saigon—causing 179,164 people to register as war victims. It is estimated that about one million urban war victims and some 800,000 rural displaced persons were generated by the fighting that year (Wiesner, 1988:170, 346).

From 1968 through to 1971 the Communists implemented a new strategy of attacking the refugee sites, in order to force the inhabitants to return to Communist-controlled territory. These attacks resulted in large numbers of deaths and many

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22 Free fire zones were specifically defined areas that were cleared of noncombatants and subjected to heavy artillery and aerial bombardment. Anything that moved in the zone was considered to be Viet Cong and thus a target.

23 The Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) was a 10-kilometre wide band along both sides of the seventeenth parallel and Ben Hai River.

24 Tet is the most important Vietnamese festival celebrating the lunar New Year.
wounded, but the outstanding factor was the number of people who were made homeless, many for at least the second time.

In 1970 the American government began implementing the “Vietnamisation” of the war while the North Vietnamese were planning another all-out assault on South Vietnam. Strengthened by the acquisition of Soviet military hardware, the North began a massive conventional military offensive on 30 March 1972. It killed tens of thousands of civilians, caused enormous destruction, and displaced over one and a quarter million persons (Wiesner, 1988:256). Although the Easter Offensive, as it became known, was a military failure for the North Vietnamese, with more than 100,000 killed on their side, it signalled the vulnerability of the Saigon regime—a position from which the South was never able to recover.

The war effort continued to deteriorate for the American and South Vietnamese forces until the signing of the Paris Peace Accords, by U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissenger and North Vietnamese negotiator Le Duc Tho on 27 January 1973, officially brought an immediate ceasefire and ended direct U.S. involvement in the war. However, fighting between the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) and their Viet Cong and NVA opponents resumed almost immediately. As the fighting resumed, so did the generation of refugees. Wiesner (1988:315, 346) reported that fighting resulted in 818,700 refugees and evacuees, together with 490,500 in-place war victims during 1973, while the following year some 417,000 persons were displaced.

As fighting intensified from the end of 1974, the weaknesses inherent in the ARVN forces and the vulnerability of the South became even more apparent to the northern commanders. With the southern forces offering little resistance, the Communists easily drove southwards, forcing vast columns of displaced persons to pour out of the battle zones. South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu ordered the

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25 Vietnamisation was a Nixon-developed policy aimed at reducing direct American involvement in Vietnam through the withdrawal of U.S. troops and turning the ground fighting over to the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN).
military evacuation of the central highlands to form, initially, coastal defences. Hundreds of thousands of refugees fled Quang Tri, Hue, and the central highland provinces—including Kontum, Pleiku and Dar Lac—for coastal enclaves, especially Da Nang. The refugee columns were frequently joined by ARVN troops who deserted and fled with their families, rampaging and looting along the way (Donnell, 1976:3). The cities were overrun with the arrival of unprecedented numbers of displaced persons, who without government support, were forced to take shelter wherever they could find room. Da Nang, for example, was “grotesquely swollen” to more than two million people after the arrival of more than half a million people during the last weeks of March (St. Cartmail, 1983:88).

As the Communist forces drove rapidly southwards during March 1975, a number of evacuation programs were implemented to remove ARVN troops and material, together with displaced persons, from coastal cities. The coastal waters off Da Nang on the final day of the evacuation were described by Snepp (1977:196) as being “littered with the refuse of the city bent on saving itself—sampans, small fishing boats, flat bottomed barges, all packed to the gunwales and wallowing in the swells” making their way out to a flotilla of Japanese, Vietnamese and American freighters. The evacuation from Da Nang managed to remove more than 70,000 refugees and 16,000 soldiers to southern ports, such as Cam Ranh Bay, although thousands were killed in the panic to escape (Snepp, 1977:196).

By the beginning of April the southern government forces had abandoned central Vietnam. The situation had become chaotic as city after city capitulated to the NVA and a human wave of at least 750,000 people flooded southwards trying to evade the northern forces. In addition, approximately 135,000 people had been evacuated south from coastal cities by American and other foreign-flag vessels by the end of the first week of April. It was estimated that more than two million people were displaced within the first four months of 1975 (Wiesner, 1988:323, 346).
The noose around Saigon gradually tightened as eighteen North Vietnamese Army divisions encircled the capital for the final offensive of the war. On 30 April 1975, the flag of the Provisional Revolutionary Government was raised on top of the Presidential Palace in Saigon bringing an end to the thirty-year conflict. It also signalled the commencement of a major refugee exodus that was to last twenty years, and which is described in detail in Chapter 3.

**REUNIFICATION, RECONSTRUCTION AND RESETTLEMENT**

The economy of Vietnam was in tatters at reunification. The North’s economy had been devastated by American bombing raids carried out between 1965 and 1972 and had yet to recover. For example, Thayer (1982:2) estimated that the agricultural sector was still at 1965 levels of production a decade later, while the southern economy, which had been kept buoyant throughout the war by the injection of billions of dollars of American aid, faltered without this lifeline. Industrial growth in the South was stagnant, as it lacked the foreign capital necessary to acquire raw materials or spare parts to increase production (Marr, 1982:56). Agricultural production in the fertile south had fallen below the level of self-sufficiency due to the loss of draught animals, extensive defoliation and the destruction of the rural infrastructure—paddy fields, wells and irrigation channels—as well as the shortage of labour caused by the abandonment of villages and migration of people to the cities. The widespread disruption of the agricultural economy saw a dramatic decline in the food situation, and in May 1975 there were almost famine conditions in the South.

Growing insecurity in the rural areas during the final years of the war led to even higher levels of urban migration, and increased South Vietnam’s urban population to forty-three per cent of the population (Table 2.1). Concurrently, the levels of

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unemployment, particularly in the newly named Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon), also soared. Donnell (1976:9) estimated that unemployment in Ho Chi Minh City at reunification exceeded 3.5 million people, with the inclusion of “1.5 million former military personnel, 1.5 million employees of the previous regime, and half a million ‘social cases’ including beggars, prostitutes and others”.

Table 2.1

Population of South Vietnam and its urban components, 1945–1975

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total population (millions)</th>
<th>Greater Saigon urban area</th>
<th>Total urban population (millions)</th>
<th>Per cent urban</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>450,000</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>1,776,000</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>2,296,000</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>2,431,000</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>3,156,000</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td>3,500,000</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>4,000,000</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Institut national de statistiques, Saigon; Nguyen Duc Nhuan, 1984; Thrift and Forbes, 1985, Table 5; cited in Desbarats, 1987b, Table 1.

Vietnam also suffered from an uneven distribution of population. The alluvial lowlands sustained high population density, often surpassing 200 persons per square kilometre, while the more elevated areas had a very low density, often below ten persons per square kilometre (De Koninck, 1980:87). Population density in the Red River Delta ranged between 250 and 850 persons per square kilometre in 1975, while in the South it ranged from between 27 and 34 persons per square kilometre in the mountainous regions to between 150 and 500 persons per square kilometre in the Mekong Delta (Figure 2.2). The two Delta areas—the Red River in the North and the Mekong River in the South—comprise less than a quarter (23%) of the total land area, but contained nearly sixty per cent (57%) of the population (Duiker, 1989:29; Jones and Fraser, 1982:115; Thrift and Forbes, 1986:66).
Figure 2.2

Source: Desbarats, 1987b; Jones and Fraser, 1982
The Hanoi government looked to rural reconstruction to help alleviate the pressures of unemployment by implementing a number of large-scale construction projects, including road, rail and bridge reconstruction and the rehabilitation of rubber plantations (Donnell, 1976:9). However, the main initiative was a rural resettlement program aimed at reversing the migration flow by transferring millions of people back to the countryside, thereby relieving pressures on the cities, while boosting agricultural output. Furthermore, the deurbanisation would also assist reshaping the old social order through the destruction of nuclei of urban-based opposition (Desbarats, 1987b:49).

Although many Vietnamese were happy to leave the refugee camps and urban slums to return to their native villages, others were enticed, not always voluntarily, to go to new villages created in depopulated or uninhabited areas in what were known as New Economic Zones (*Kinh Te Moi*).

The New Economic Zone (NEZ) was a concept resurrected from the DRV’s first five-year plan in the early 1960s, which established middle-sized urban centres in underdeveloped areas encompassing both agriculture and manufacturing sectors. The establishment of NEZs had multiple goals, including the redeployment of the labour force over the national territory, to increase food production, to reduce unemployment, to facilitate crop specialisation, to establish a system of state farms, to promote rapid collectivisation, to contain internal political resistance and to bolster external security (Desbarats, 1987b:54). The 1975 program initially planned to resettle two million people to the NEZs, mostly in the sparsely populated areas of the Central Highlands and along sections of the Cambodian border, with smaller numbers in the Mekong Delta.

Resettlement to the NEZs was supposedly voluntary, with people encouraged to migrate by the lack of employment opportunities in the cities and the meagre food ration provided to those without an approved job (Wain, 1981:40). However, Duiker (1989:15) claimed that certain groups of the population—"members of the previous regime, the minorities, the poor and the unemployable"—were forcibly recruited, and Wain (1981:40) stated that many were coerced by threats against family members held
in reeducation camps. Many of those forced to move to the NEZs in the South were, according to Duiker (1989:59), ethnic Chinese. The resettlement program also involved the large-scale displacement of ethnic minorities from the Vietnamese highlands. For example, it is estimated that more than 1.5 million Montagnards were relocated from the highlands to flatland reservations (Aurora Foundation, 1989:87).

The Vietnam News Agency (VNA) reported on 17 July 1976, that 500,000 Saigon residents had moved to the countryside as part of Vietnam’s deurbanisation program since the fall of Saigon. About 300,000 people had returned to their villages from which they fled during the war, while 200,000 “unemployed slum dwellers” were resettled in NEZs (St. Cartmail, 1983:30). The government reported that over half a million people moved to NEZs by the end of 1976, and that more than one million people returned to their home villages (Duiker, 1989:15; Wain, 1981:41). A further 250,000 persons moved to the NEZs in 1977, and by the end of 1978 more than 1.3 million persons resettled to eighty-two NEZs that had been constructed containing 350,000 hectares of reclaimed land (Duiker, 1989:45, 65). Almost one million people—nearly all northerners—were relocated to NEZs during the Third Five Year Plan, 1980–1985 (Desbarats, 1990a:199).

Desbarats’ (1987b:63) research on the geographical effects of the resettlement scheme found that the vast majority of migrant flows were interprovincial movements that involved a substantial degree of uprooting, and only twelve per cent were relatively short-distance, intraprovincial flows. She also found the majority of movements were destined for southern provinces, including ninety-one per cent of all interprovincial

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27 In addition to the Hoa, there are approximately 60 other ethnic minorities in Vietnam who comprised about 4.8 per cent of the population in 1979. The most notable groups are the Tay, Khmer, Tai, Muong, Nung, Hmong and Dao.

28 Montagnards is a French term for the people of the mountains. It is not an ethnic description but a generic term to describe 30 or more “primitive” societies located mainly in the mountainous, forested area that separates Vietnam and Laos. The largest of these groups are the Jarai, Rhade, Bahnar, Sedang and Nung. The official Vietnamese term for these people is nguoi thu o ng (upland people), although they are often referred to as moi—a derogatory term meaning savage (Hartt, 1993:1).
movements, and seventy-four per cent of all intraprovincial flows. There were undoubtedly strategic considerations why these southern destinations were chosen (Thrift and Forbes, 1986:130).  

The decongestion of Ho Chi Minh City and other urban centres, which had swollen with refugees, was one of the principal objectives of the resettlement program in the early post-war (1976–1979) period (Figure 2.3). In addition, the resettlement program also aimed to even out some of the population density differentials mentioned above, especially those between the North and the South (Figure 2.4). The movement of people out of the Red River Delta and the Bac Bo plain (Hanoi and the provinces of Ha Nam Ninh and Ha Son Binh) in the North and the coastal provinces of Central Vietnam (Ninh Tri Thien, Quang Nam–Da Nang and Nghia Binh) to areas in the Central Highlands and the South was also important (Figures 2.3 and 2.4) (Desbarats, 1987b:65; Fraser, 1985:6). In later years (between 1980 and 1984), the program was primarily used to alleviate population pressures in the North, particularly from Hanoi, Ha Nam Ninh, Thai Binh, Hai Hung and Ha Son Binh, and to a lesser extent in central Vietnam (Binh Tri Thien and Nghia Binh provinces).

The Central Highlands was the dominant receiving area (for both periods considered) because of the low population densities and the concentration of Montagnard populations. Almost half of all interprovincial flows were headed for three southern provinces: Song Be (19%), Lam Dong (16%) and Dac Lac (13%). During the Second Plan, Dac Lac, Song Be and Tay Ninh accounted for more than half of total inflows (Desbarats, 1987b:65). Cambodian commando raids destroyed NEZs close to the border in Tay Ninh, An Giang, Dong Thap and Kien Giang provinces and forced the government to stop resettlement in low density areas along the southern border.

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29 Thrift and Forbes (1986:130) argued that northerners were sent to the Central Highlands in order for there to be a loyal population among some troublesome mountain tribes. Similarly, many were sent to the provinces adjoining the Cambodian border.
Figure 2.3

Provinces
1. An Giang
2. Bac Thai
3. Ben Tre
4. Binh Tri Thien
5. Cao Lang
6. Cuu Long
7. Dac Lac
8. Dong Nai
9. Dong Thap
10. Giai Lai - Kontum
11. Ha Bac
12. Ha Nam Ninh
13. Ha Son Binh
14. Ha Tuyen
15. Hai Hung
16. Hai Phong
17. Hanoi
18. Hau Giang
19. Ho Chi Minh
20. Hoang Lien Son
22. Lai Chau
23. Lam Dong
24. Long An
25. Minh Hai
26. Nghe Tinh
27. Nghia Binh
28. Phu Khanh
29. Quang Nam - Da Nang
30. Quang Ninh
31. Son La
32. Song Be
33. Tay Ninh
34. Thai Binh
35. Thanh Hoa
36. Thuan Hai
37. Tien Giang
38. Vinh Phu

North-North
South-South
No. of people (thousands)

Source: Desbarats, 1987b:64; Fraser, 1985:1–5
Figure 2.4


Source: Desbarats, 1987b:64; Fraser, 1985:1–5
Figure 2.4


Source: Desbarats, 1987b:64; Fraser, 1985:1–5
However, Chinese attacks into northern Vietnam in February 1979 did not stop resettlement in the five provinces abutting the border.

Conditions in the NEZs were extremely harsh. The NEZ settlers were allocated between 500 and 2,000 square metres of land, and provided with tools, seeds, housing materials, and amenities. Basic infrastructure on the NEZ sites was provided by the local authorities, and the land was supposedly prepared for resettlement by gangs of cadres (Desbarats, 1987b:54). However, many new settlers arrived to find that the area had not been prepared and that the allocated land was jungle, or else desolate waste land too barren to sustain crops—often a result of being sprayed with chemical defoliants. To make matters worse, millions of unexploded bombs, artillery shells, mines and other explosive devices lay undetected in the ground, making farming even more hazardous (Thayer, 1982:4). The problems were exacerbated by the lack of promised resources, such as water supply, food, tools and building materials. Marr (1982:54) argued that the programs suffered from “bureaucratic confusion, disease and destitution”.

Many of the new farmers, especially those from urban backgrounds, were unable to make a living in the NEZs due to the harsh conditions and their inexperience in agricultural production and land clearance, so they returned—illegally—to the cities (Niehaus, 1979:87). A Western correspondent claimed in 1978 that almost half of the million people who had been resettled to the countryside had moved back to the cities (Kogelfranz cited in Desbarats, 1987b:61). Nguyen Duc Nhuan (1984:86), a Vietnamese social scientist, claimed that between thirty and forty per cent of those transferred to rural areas flowed back to the urban centres due to shortages of food, medicine and tools. There was also a significant out-migration from NEZs in the Cambodian border region due to raids by Khmer Rouge troops and the subsequent border war, which severely disrupted the resettlement program.
THE THIRD INDOCHINA WAR (1975–1978)

Even before reunification of the two Vietnams, the long historical conflict between Cambodia and Vietnam—which had been dormant during the French colonial rule and American intervention—erupted again. Days after the fall of Phnom Penh on 17 April 1975, the Khmer Rouge leader Pol Pot issued a directive that the entire Vietnamese minority in Cambodia should be expelled or exterminated, and troops dispatched to Cambodia’s eastern border. The following month the Khmer Rouge troops attacked—and challenged for control of—Vietnamese islands in the Gulf of Thailand: Phu Quoc Island on 4 May and Tho Chu Island six days later. These raids were followed by incursions into Vietnam’s border provinces resulting in bloody clashes that were later blamed on soldiers’ unfamiliarity of the local geography (Chanda, 1986:14).

From early 1977 there was an increase in the number of border incursions by Cambodian forces, apparently irritated at the continued Vietnamese occupation of areas claimed by Pol Pot’s government. In April, Khmer Rouge forces, with artillery support, attacked “almost every area” located along the disputed Cambodian-Vietnamese border, particularly settlements in the New Economic Zones (Leighton, 1978:448). Vietnamese villages and towns stretching from Ha Tien to Tay Ninh were terrorised by Khmer Rouge soldiers, who the Vietnamese government stated had been stirred up by anti-Vietnamese hatred and ordered to advance and massacre Vietnamese civilians in “crimes of unheard-of savagery ... that were both clearly premeditated and coordinated” (The Vietnam-Kampuchea Conflict, 1979:21). In An Giang province alone, 222 people were killed, and 552 houses and 134 tons of paddy were burned between 25 April and 19 May, 1977 (Nguyen-vo, 1992:97).

More than 500,000 ethnic Vietnamese were resident in Cambodia in 1975, while more than a million ethnic Cambodians resided in southern Vietnam, especially in the Mekong Delta region (Leighton, 1978:448).
The fighting escalated further in September, and on the 24th of that month Khmer Rouge soldiers attacked inside Tay Ninh province and brutally massacred hundreds of Vietnamese civilians. Chanda (1986:223) described how “house after house presented the same gory sight” of men, women and children beaten to death by staves, with bodies decapitated and disembowelled. Heder (1978b:38) stated that the Cambodian attacks in the Tay Ninh area may have been provoked by Vietnamese NEZ settlers moving onto what was perceived to be Cambodian territory.31 In the Ha Tien massacre of 14 March, the Khmer Rouge soldiers had scrawled in charcoal on a door “Ti nih srok yoong—this is our country” (Chanda, 1986:224).

The initial Cambodian attacks and Vietnamese counter-attacks displaced more than 750,000 villagers, with the total number eventually exceeding 1.2 million people (Wain, 1981:42). It is impossible to establish how many ethnic Vietnamese living in Cambodia also escaped into Vietnam following a Khmer Rouge directive that all ethnic Vietnamese in the eastern border district, and all Khmers who spoke Vietnamese or had Vietnamese spouses or friends, should be handed over to the state security service, which generally meant a death sentence (Chanda, 1986:86).

The origins of the border dispute were part of a complex interaction of history, geography and politics, incorporating what Heder (1978a:3) eloquently stated as “traditional antagonism, colonial manipulation, and incompatible ideology”. Moreover, it was a spark—although not the only factor—which ignited the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia on 25 December 1978. This in turn was a factor in Vietnam’s deteriorating relations with China and the subsequent Chinese offensive into northern Vietnam.

Following the overthrow of the Pol Pot regime in January 1979, the Vietnamese government launched a massive population resettlement program into Cambodia (and Laos). It was estimated that some 200,000 Vietnamese were resettled to the Mekong

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31 Much of the South West portion of Vietnam used to be Khmer territory, referred to as Khmer Krom or Kampuchea Krom. For example, several hundred years ago Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon) was a Cambodian fishing village.
River area in eastern Cambodia by July 1979, and at least 250,000 by the end of November (Chang, 1982:205).

**THE SINO-VIETNAMESE WAR (1979)**

China initiated a limited invasion into Vietnam on 17 February 1979, intending to “teach Vietnam a lesson” by occupying disputed territory previously held by the Vietnamese, thereby forcing it to enter negotiations. Gilks (1992:228) claimed that the conflict related to bilateral, regional and strategic conflicts of interest that existed with Vietnam as a result of the changing pattern of the triangular relations vis-à-vis the Soviet Union. By stabilising the land border China also hoped to stem the flow of ethnic Chinese (Hoa) refugees (Gilks, 1992:228).

However, the Chinese incursion backfired and it had “terrible consequences for hundreds of thousands” of ethnic Chinese, who the Vietnamese government decided to systematically evict (Wain, 1981:77). The Hoa along the northern border and in the major cities were considered a potential security problem by the Vietnamese government, which feared a second Chinese attack. Consequently, the government decided to remove them and adopted a new covert policy of actively coercing the Hoa to leave—by giving them an ultimatum of either leaving Vietnam or else being removed to “concentration points”.32 The Hanoi directive had an immediate impact on the country’s ethnic Chinese population, which fell from an estimated population of 1,236,000 (3.0% of the total population) in 1976 to 935,000 on 1 October 1979 (1.77% of total population) (Tran, 1993:25). The decline in the ethnic Chinese population was quite significant in some areas. For example, in Quang Ninh, where the Hoa population of 160,000 had comprised nearly a quarter (22%) of the provincial population, it dropped to 5,000, or 0.6 per cent, in the early 1980s (Tran, 1993:25). The British

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32 Wain (1981:77) defined the “concentration points” as New Economic Zones exclusively for the ethnic Chinese, situated far away from any economic centre.
Ambassador to Vietnam estimated that there were fewer than 30,000 ethnic Chinese remaining in the North at the end of May 1979, and only about one-quarter of the Hoa population remained in the northern cities of Hanoi and Hai Phong in July (Stern, 1984:299; Wain, 1981:78). Although the Ambassador’s figures are probably exaggerated, the numbers of Chinese in the country were reduced considerably. There was a massive outflow of mainly ethnic Chinese refugees from Vietnam by land and boat, which is described fully in Chapter 3.

**SUMMARY**

It is evident from the brief description in this chapter that voluntary and involuntary migration has been a frequent response to crisis throughout Vietnam’s history, but especially during the First and Second Indochina Wars that ravaged the country for thirty years. However, it was during the supposedly “peaceful” years following reunification that more than one million refugees escaped from the country. The following chapter examines the waves of refugees that have flooded out of Vietnam since the fall of Saigon in 1975, and the impact these migrations have had on asylum nations and the international community, and the policies adopted to cope with these migrations.
3


My country is weak and small
Undergoes all sorts of woe!
My people have just nice dreams
Yet they must still linger in jail …
My country never knows joy
We sweat all day
At night we cry
The army and the jails claim all the men
Survivors are just a few …
Children go hungry and pale
No man is ever at home!
All ploughings in female hands
Death telegrams fall like rain!
Tragic land, o tragic land!
Only bullhorns … are joyful!

My country is weak and small
Undergoes all sorts of woe!
My people have just nice dreams
Yet they still must linger in jail …
My country knows only sweat
Flags dyed in blood
Shown here and there
The world’s blind or myopic
The people can cry their hearts out …
So long as they wave red flags
Waving to freedom robbers
As they sit on our ruins
Our bones, our skulls!
I don’t remember them all!
I can’t remember them all!
Dzuan, Giap, Ho Ho, Chiang-gling et al. …

Nguyen Ngoc Bich (nd:1)
The fall of the South Vietnam government on 30 April 1975 unleashed a flood of refugees onto the shores of neighbouring countries that were ill-equipped, and largely unwilling, to become involved the crisis. It is estimated that between 1.5 and 2.5 million Vietnamese fled their homeland in search of freedom and ultimately, although not exclusively, resettlement to the West. The magnitude of the exodus, and the reluctance of asylum and resettlement countries to accept the outflow, saw considerable changes implemented during this period. It was not until after changes in Vietnam’s economic policy in 1986 and the introduction of an unprecedented agreement between all parties involved, that the crisis abated.

Five distinct waves of refugee displacement are evident in the twenty-one year (1975–1996) history of the Vietnamese exodus. The earliest phase consisted of an unknown number of anticipatory refugees who left Vietnam for Western countries in the weeks preceding the fall of Saigon on 30 April 1975, setting the precedent that more than one million other Vietnamese would attempt to emulate in subsequent years.¹ This was followed by a wave of some 30,000 acute refugees who escaped to neighbouring countries in the region between mid-1975 and early 1978.² The third wave involved the mass departure of mainly ethnic Chinese (or Hoa) who fled Vietnam from early 1978 until mid-1979 following a government purge against them. More than 260,000 persons escaped to China, and 60,000 to ASEAN³ states and Hong Kong during this period.

Vietnam’s agreement to a moratorium on the outflow of refugees in mid-1979 resulted

¹ The term “anticipatory” refugee was devised by Kunz (1973) to describe those refugees who anticipated the dangers ahead, and left the country before the military and political situation prevented their orderly departure. Kunz (personal communication, 1996) claimed that the large number of Vietnamese students studying in Western countries may have been amongst the first anticipatory refugees from Vietnam, who left months—or even years—before the fall of Saigon.

² The second type of refugee migration identified by Kunz (1973) was “acute”—which emanated from sudden changes, such as those resulting from political and/or military coups.

³ ASEAN—the Association of South East Asian Nations—is a regional political forum concerned with economic growth, social and cultural development, the promotion of regional peace and stability and the collaboration and mutual assistance on matters of common interest. It was established in 1967 by the governments of Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand. It was subsequently joined by Brunei (1984), Vietnam (1995), Laos (1997), Myanmar (1997) and Cambodia (1999) (ASEAN, 1999:1-10).
in the sharp decline in the number of boat people during this fourth displacement phase (1979–1988). The fifth and final wave was those persons who left Vietnam following the introduction of the Comprehensive Plan of Action in 1989, and were required to establish their refugee status according to international conventions.

EVACUATION: THE FIRST WAVE

The exodus of refugees leaving Vietnam began weeks before North Vietnamese Army Tank 843 crashed through the iron gates and rolled across the lawns towards the Presidential Palace in Saigon on 30 April 1975. Numerous Chinese families from Cholon, who had foreseen the collapse of the South Vietnam government, elected to close their businesses and quietly travel to coastal ports in the hope of obtaining passage aboard a ship out of the country, rather than wait and take their chances under a Communist government. The Saigon government prohibited all overseas travel from early 1975 to avert a mass exodus of people, and only issued passports in special cases—a category that required a bribe of more than US$2,000 to qualify (St. Cartmail, 1983:64).

Between ten and fifteen thousand anticipatory refugees managed—by persistence, luck or forgery—to board the limited number of commercial, military and “black” flights and flee Saigon during the final weeks of the Second Indochina War (Lewins and Ly, 1985:10). The American airlift of American citizens and “high risk” Vietnamese was accelerated on 20 April to accommodate the increasing number of people who wanted to leave the country, and the following day the evacuation was

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4 Cholon (meaning “big market”) is a Chinese-dominated trading centre that was established in 1778 by a group of Chinese from Tran Bien (now Bien Hoa). The original Cholon was established five kilometres southwest of Saigon, but as the latter city expanded over time, it came to absorb, and expand around, Cholon. Today, Cholon is situated in districts 5 and 6 of Ho Chi Minh City. It remains a hub of Chinese economic activities.

5 A number of flights were arranged by American agencies to evacuate Vietnamese who were neither “high risk” nor legally eligible. The flights were organised without the permission of the Thieu government or the American Ambassador to Vietnam, and were known as “black” flights.
expanded into a twenty-four hour operation. The number of persons evacuated—both American and Vietnamese—increased at a dramatic rate, with approximately 500 persons evacuated on the twentieth, 1,500 the following day, 3,000 by the twenty-second, and more than 6,000 by the twenty-sixth (Snepp, 1977:319, 358).

Even before the evacuation became fully operational there were problems concerning where to send the evacuated Vietnamese. Many of the South East Asian governments were unwilling to provide asylum to the Vietnamese refugees without guarantees of resettlement, which the American government would not provide. The Philippines government complained about the influx of refugees, and there were doubts whether Clark Air Force Base, where many of the early evacuees were taken, could be used as a transit point much longer. Therefore, an alternative destination—the former U.S. Air Force base on the American protectorate of Guam—was chosen as the reception centre for the Vietnamese refugees. Washington notified the Guam government to expect up to 5,000 evacuees per day, and to make provisions to feed and house them for up to ninety days (Snepp, 1977:324). On 26 April, Wake Island—2,500 kilometres northeast of Guam—was added as a second reception centre to relieve the increasing congestion on Guam.

The number of people attempting to get out of South Vietnam increased as each day passed. Hundreds of Vietnamese waited anxiously outside the American Embassy for visas or affidavits of support, while inside the number of Americans and Vietnamese waiting for a seat aboard any outbound flight outstripped the system, so that by the twenty-sixth the gates were temporarily closed to sort out the backlog. Embassy officers were accused by Snepp (1977:320–324) of circumventing the consular evacuation procedures to ensure places on the outbound flights for their own friends, and the situation worsened with the appearance of thousands of stolen laissez-passer forms on the black market, where they were sold for extravagant prices. The resultant flood of

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6 Clark Air Force Base was the former U.S. Air Force base situated on the island of Luzon in the Philippines.
additional passengers destroyed the established quota system and it became everyone for themselves.

The fixed-wing airlift was brought to a complete halt in the late afternoon of 28 April following the bombing of Tan Son Nhut airport by five captured South Vietnamese jets. The runway was strewn with crippled aircraft and other equipment, including jettisoned fuel tanks and live bombs (Snepp, 1977:386). The situation in Saigon the following morning was described by Snepp (1977:415–427) as chaotic, with what appeared to be the entire population taking to the streets in a last ditched effort to save themselves. Mobs of hysterical Vietnamese surged towards designated departure points such as the American Embassy, where a crowd twenty to thirty deep was screaming to be allowed inside. Many Vietnamese adopted desperate, and often unscrupulous, efforts to escape, bribing their way past security guards, or forcing their entry aboard departing helicopters. *U.S. News* reported “some wealthy Vietnamese promised Americans large amounts of money to marry or adopt their children to insure safe evacuation from the Communist-threatened city. A few even offered their wives” (cited in Liu et al., 1979:14). At the docklands, several barges were charging passengers between US$5,000 to $10,000 per seat.

The collapse of the planned fixed-wing evacuation from the airport forced the Americans to revert to an emergency operation to remove evacuees—known as Option IV (or Operation Frequent Wind)—that utilised eighty-one helicopters, five aircraft carriers, a dozen destroyers, and eight cargo ships of the U.S. Seventh Fleet’s Task Force 76 stationed offshore in the South China Sea (Snepp, 1977:294). Just after midday on 29 April, the first of more than 630 helicopter sorties took off from the Task Force to ferry evacuees from several make-shift helicopter pads on top of tall buildings in Saigon—in particular the American Embassy—back to the waiting fleet. The last helicopter left the roof of the U.S. Embassy shortly after dawn on 30 April, as the first NVA T-54 tanks crossed the Saigon River and entered the city proper.
The eighteen-hour operation evacuated 1,373 Americans, 5,595 Vietnamese and 85 "third country nationals". American Ambassador Martin later estimated that the entire American airlift had managed to lift out some 51,888 people—6,763 Americans and 45,125 Vietnamese and other nationals—during the month of April, and that altogether the American Embassy had been responsible for the evacuation of more than 59,000 people aboard commercial, "black" and military flights, as well as 6,000 people by barges on the final day (Snepp, 1977:469–470).

Despite the large numbers removed from Vietnam during the evacuation, the operation was described as a "monumental screw-up" (Far Eastern Economic Review cited in Lewins and Ly, 1975:10). Snepp’s (1977) critical analysis of the airlift revealed that the American Embassy in Saigon had bungled the operation, delaying the evacuation until it was too late to effectively remove all the "appropriate" people. The Americans could not control precisely who left in the chaos that persisted during that final week, so consequently over half of those evacuated were the "wrong" people—farmers, fishermen, students, street vendors, small shopkeepers, local policemen, instead of the designated "high risk" Vietnamese, that included hundreds of Communist defectors, several thousand direct operatives of the American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and up to 30,000 agents trained by the CIA for the Phoenix program (Lewins and Ly, 1985:10; Wain, 1981:38).

A third and final component of the evacuation included some sixty thousand persons who commandeered vessels of all descriptions and took to sea in search of the American fleet that was standing offshore. Most of this unlikely armada found the

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7 An American study on the evacuation estimated that more than 69,000 of the 130,000 refugees in American care were outside the targetted categories. It had been intended to evacuate 4,000 orphans, 10,000–75,000 relatives of American citizens or permanent resident aliens, and up to 50,000 "high risk" categories (cited in Lewins and Ly, 1985:10).

8 Operation Phoenix (Phuong Hoang) was an American program run by the CIA and military intelligence between 1968 and 1971 in conjunction with Vietnam's National Police and Provincial Reconnaissance Units. It aimed to "neutralize" members of the Viet Cong civilian infrastructure through arrests, imprisonment and assassination. This "sterile, depersonalized murder program" resulted in the deaths of 20,857 persons (Andrade cited in McGehee, 1996).
waiting fleet, however, some sailed for weeks to reach Subic Bay or Guam, or perished along the way. Many of the 135,000 anticipatory refugees had fled in fear of widespread reprisals and bloodbath at the hands of the Communists, while thousands of others appeared to have just got caught up in the panic and joined the exodus, not knowing where they were going or why they were there.

**Characteristics of Anticipatory Refugees**

The anticipatory refugees who fled during April were mainly ethnic Vietnamese (Osborne, 1980:39) and according to Kelly (1977:35) could be classified into three groups. The first group consisted of dependents of Americans, who were relatively well equipped to resettle in the United States with existing support networks upon their arrival, and would therefore not become a burden on the government. The second group, and the one that best fits Kunz's concept of anticipatory refugees, consisted of former employees of the U.S. government and companies, who spoke good English, were well educated, and possessed skills applicable for resettlement in the United States, and were—on the whole according to Kelly (1977:35)—“urbanised and Westernised”. The third category of Vietnamese refugees—and the majority who resettled in America during 1975—were lower level government officials, teachers, rank and file members of the armed services, petty traders, farmers and fishermen. Kelly (1977:35) stated that some U.S. officials considered that these people should not have been evacuated and resettled, as they were not necessarily urban, had few skills that were useable in the United States, spoke little or no English, and were totally unacquainted with life outside their parish or village in Vietnam.

Kunz (1973:131, 1981a:49) claimed that anticipatory refugees generally travelled directly to the country of settlement, well prepared for their future with financial resources, some knowledge of the language, and some awareness of how to enter a particular trade or profession. In addition, they were more likely to be well-informed, well-to-do, and well-educated. There is little information available on those
anticipatory refugees who took commercial flights out of Saigon in the weeks preceding the collapse of the country, but it is plausible that they would have met these criteria, as they would have required contact with high ranking officials and/or money to arrange or bribe their way out of the country in the turmoil.

In contrast, there is a considerable amount known about the people who were evacuated as part of the American airlift. Government statistics on 124,457 refugees—which represents ninety-seven per cent of the 128,110 who resettled in the United States—revealed a higher proportion of males (54.7%) than females (45.3%) in the total refugee population, with males more numerous in all age groups, especially the 18–24 (11.0%) and 25–34 (9.8%) year old age groups, which were the largest age groups overall and noticeably larger than the corresponding female age groups: 7.4% and 7.2% respectively (Liu et al., 1979:43–44). Not surprisingly, these two male age groups correspond with the years that males were required to undertake military service.

Although there is insufficient information to determine whether this large proportion of young adult males was due to an excessive number of escaping military personnel, the Camp Pendleton survey revealed that seventeen per cent (10) of the fifty-nine household heads had stated that their occupation were military. Despite the excess of males—which is not unusual in refugee situations—Liu et al. (1979:44) argued that the composition of the refugee population was surprisingly well-balanced considering the hurried and traumatic circumstances of the escape.

Statistics indicate that the refugee population as a whole was relatively young, with almost two-thirds (64.3%) under twenty-five years and more than nine out of ten (91.5%) under forty-five years (Inter-Agency Task Force cited in Liu et al., 1979:48). Almost half (45.9%) of the refugee population was made up of children less than eighteen years, which Liu et al. (1979:44) attributed to the strength of the Vietnamese

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9 The U.S. government conducted a survey of fifty-nine newly-arrived refugees at the Camp Pendleton resettlement centre in California. Interviews were conducted by staff of the Asian American Mental Health Research Center in cooperation with the U.S. Navy Research Center from early June through to late September 1975 (Liu et al., 1979:14).
family unit and the enormous effort that household heads made to evacuate their families. They argued that the small proportion of refugees aged over thirty-five years (18.7%) could indicate that few grandparents were evacuated and that “flight appealed more to persons with their future in front of them than to persons in late middle age with more to lose”.

The educational attainment of the refugee population was assessed from data on 30,628 household heads and 67,033 other evacuees aged eighteen years or more. This revealed that almost three-quarters (74.2%) of household heads had attended secondary school and over one-quarter (27.4%) had attended university, while for other evacuees aged eighteen and over these were 57.4 per cent and 19.5 per cent respectively (Liu et al., 1979:49). The high educational attainment among the refugee population is supported by the occupations of the household heads, with almost one-third (31.2%) in professional, technical and managerial positions, including seven per cent in medical professions (Liu et al., 1979:49–50).

On average, seven out of ten household heads had at least some English language ability, with 36.7 per cent possessing good skills, and 35.5 per cent some.10 English language skills were not as prevalent among the total refugee population—with almost two-thirds (64.7%) having no skills, 21.0 per cent some, and only 13.9 per cent good skills—which Liu et al. (1979:50–51) attributed to the young age of the population.

The socio-economic status of the refugees in the Camp Pendleton sample was found by Liu et al. (1979:52) to be “the ‘upper-middle class’ equivalent of the Vietnamese society”. Their synopsis of the refugee population was that it was “a young, relatively well-educated and skilled segment of the population”, which fits well with Kunz’s expectations of anticipatory refugees (Liu et al., 1979:61).

10 Liu et al. (1979:50–51) did not detail what criteria were used to distinguish the English language categories.
THE SECOND WAVE (1975–1978)

The mass departure of Vietnamese that began in those chaotic weeks of April 1975 never stopped, but continued—in crests and troughs—over the next twenty-one years. Hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese disillusioned with the Communist government—ranging from former politicians and bureaucrats, businessmen, property-owners and ex-servicemen, to farmers and fishermen—were willing to risk the dangers aboard ill-equipped, over-crowded and unsafe boats to travel through pirate-infested waters in search of asylum in a neighbouring country, and ultimately, resettlement to the West (Wain, 1981:42).

It is impossible to determine the exact number of refugees who left Vietnam in the early years due to the poor recording procedures and the different criteria used, together with the fact that many perished at sea. Many authors simply referred to Indochinese refugees, which included Vietnamese, Laotian and Cambodian refugees, while others, such as Frost (1980) simply referred to Vietnamese boat people and did not include those Vietnamese who travelled overland through Cambodia to Thailand. Even though statistics were usually obtained from UNHCR, these did not necessarily include all refugees, but referred only to those under UNHCR protection in the particular countries. For example, there were Vietnamese refugees in Malaysia who were not housed in UNHCR camps, and therefore not included in official U.N. statistics. These problems led to large discrepancies in the estimates of refugee numbers within the various asylum countries. Consequently, refugee data for the early period of the crisis is of questionable validity.

The number of refugees arriving in asylum countries in the initial outflow was relatively small—Frost (1980:348) claimed that only 377 boat people arrived in South East Asian countries and Hong Kong in 1975, while Pongsapich and Chongwatana

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11 For example, Feith (1988:18) estimated that at least 100,000 boat people were killed at sea in the first decade of the exodus.
(1988:13) stated that 4,446 Vietnamese arrived in Thailand. The number of boat people soared in following years—to 5,248 in 1976 and 15,657 in 1977—while Vietnamese arrivals in Thailand were 5,213 and 5,328, respectively (Frost, 1980:348; Pongsapich and Chongwatana, 1988:13).

The impact of this refugee torrent on asylum nations varied from country to country. The flow of refugees frequently changed directions, as the asylum countries implemented different strategies and policies to cope with the growing refugee problem.


The revolutionary accession of Communist governments in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos in 1975 resulted in the massive displacement of populations and compelled surrounding nations to become involved in the crisis as they were inundated with refugees. However, for the most part, the refugees were not welcomed visitors in the asylum nations, with China the only country in the region that permitted refugees to settle en masse. The remaining first asylum countries refused, with some minor exceptions, to settle Vietnamese refugees and only granted them temporary asylum pending resettlement in the West.12

The massive influx of refugees into the South East Asian nations was considered by many as a threat to the economic, social and political stability of the region. ASEAN considered that the refugee crisis was a political and not a humanitarian issue that was primarily the legacy of U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War and therefore an American responsibility. Somewhat surprisingly, the staunchly anti-communist governments that comprised ASEAN at that time did not share the American axiom of the need to offer refugees an alternative to life under communism (Sutter, 1990:97). Instead, the ASEAN states were particularly concerned about the presence of a Vietnamese “fifth column” in

12 Although the asylum nations did not allow mass Vietnamese settlement, various countries did allow some small-scale settlement. For example, Vietnamese with connections, such as spouses, were permitted to settle in Indonesia, the Philippines and Korea.
the refugee flows. For example, Singapore Foreign Minister, S. Rajaratnam, later stated that “each junkload of men, women and children sent to our shores is a bomb to destabilise, disrupt, and cause turmoil and dissension in ASEAN states. This is a preliminary invasion to pave the way for a final invasion” (cited in Frost, 1980:361). American Under Secretary of State, Walter J. Stoessel, stated that the presence of large refugee populations in the ASEAN nations threatened internal security by providing recruits for communist insurgency groups, retarded economic development, and caused political unrest among local populations, particularly in the case of ethnic Chinese refugees (Sutter, 1990:97).

Another concern was Vietnam’s intentions in the region—a fear later fulfilled with Vietnam’s invasion of Cambodia. Sutter (1990:98) argued that the ASEAN nations were trapped between Vietnam on the one side, which had caused the outflow, and Western humanitarianism on the other, which called on ASEAN to accept the refugee burden yet was not willing to provide resettlement offers. Therefore, it is no surprise that all the ASEAN member nations rejected permanent settlement as a solution to the problem.

Despite this consensus, the major asylum countries of the region—the five ASEAN nations, China and Hong Kong—have frequently responded to the refugee influxes differently. These different strategies and responses, together with changing policies in Vietnam, resulted in fluctuations in refugee flows to the different asylum countries.

Thailand

Thailand was the first ASEAN country to be affected by the refugee flows out of Indochina after 1975 and has shouldered the greatest refugee burden of all asylum nations. The country not only had to cope with the inflow of Vietnamese, but also

Cambodian refugees escaping from the genocidal regime of Pol Pot, and even greater numbers of Laotians displaced by the policies of the new communist government.\textsuperscript{14}

Thailand reluctantly received the largest numbers of Vietnamese refugees in the initial outflow, with UNHCR placing the number of arrivals at 4,446 persons in 1975, 5,213 in 1976 and 5,328 in 1977 (Chantavanich, 1993:4; Pongsapich and Chongwatana, 1988:13–14). It is worth reiterating Pongsapich and Chongwatana (1988:13–14), who stated that “the actual number of refugees and displaced persons in Thailand is not easily accounted for or readily available”.\textsuperscript{15}

The Thai government became disturbed at the increasing number of boat arrivals, and consequently changed policies in November 1977, directing local authorities to resupply the boats and then push them off to other destinations. The Thai Navy, supported by spotter aircraft, towed the refugee vessels out to sea where they were subject to the plundering raids of Thai pirates who cruised the Gulf of Siam in search of the defenceless, but lucrative, refugee boats (St. Cartmail, 1983:211).

Government policies and pirate attacks deterred many refugee boats from heading to Thailand, and by the end of 1978 the number of boats arriving there was relatively low. Most vessels chose instead to head further south to Malaysia and, to a lesser extent, Indonesia.

\textit{Malaysia}

The geographical proximity of Vietnam to peninsular Malaysia—slightly more than 360 kilometres at the closest point—has been a major factor why thousands of

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{14} By the end of 1977, approximately 14,000 Vietnamese, 30,000 Cambodians, and 100,000 Laotians had arrived in Thailand (Chantavanich, 1993).

\textsuperscript{15} There were significant variations in estimates of Vietnamese—as well as Cambodian and Laotian—refugees in Thailand and elsewhere. For example, according to St. Cartmail (1983:211–212) there were 4,175 Vietnamese arrivals in Thailand in 1975, 5,928 in 1977, 4,884 in 1977, and then almost doubling to 8,240 in 1978—a total of 23,227. In comparison, Pongsapich and Chongwatana (1988:13–14) estimated that there were 14,987 arrivals between 1975 and 1978, and Thitupanich (1986:33) claimed that there were only 7,360 Vietnamese refugees in Thailand between April 1975 and September 1979.}
refugee boats risked adverse weather and marauding pirates to land on the east coast of Malaysia. From small beginnings—just 77 refugees arrived in 1977—the numbers increased at an astounding rate to 1,080 in 1976 and 5,817 in 1977, before exploding to 59,183 persons in 1978, when monthly arrivals climaxed at 19,227 persons in November (Rachagan, 1987:261; Wain, 1979:161).

Most of the early refugees who arrived in Malaysia were received with a certain degree of compassion, but as arrivals increased, so did tension and hostilities within the local population. The poor, predominantly Malay and devoutly Muslim population of the underdeveloped east coast resented the perceived special treatment refugees received from the Malaysian government, and “grew irritated and hostile towards the refugees” (Von Der Mehden cited in Lavoie and Knock, 1990:45).

The Malaysian government grew apprehensive at the continued escalation in refugee arrivals and enacted harsh new policies. The refugees were classified as “illegal immigrants”—which prohibited their entry into Malaysia under the Immigration Act—and the refugee camps were made restricted areas, with refugees not permitted outside the compounds and prohibited from having contact with the local populace. Refugee boats intercepted that were considered seaworthy were restocked with fuel and supplies, and towed back out to sea (Rachagan, 1987, 261).

**Indonesia**

Initially, it appeared that Indonesia would be spared the problem of large-scale refugee arrivals that had plagued Thailand and Malaysia, because it was more distant from Vietnam, but as other countries in the region enforced deterrence policies, more and more refugees looked to Indonesia for asylum. Statistics on refugee arrivals in Indonesia during the early years are both rare, and of questionable quality. Osborne (1980:50) stated that 3,200 refugees “at most” had arrived in Indonesia until April 1979, while Frost (1980:354–357) indicated that 2,932 arrived in 1978 and 5,338 in the first three months of the following year.
**Singapore**

Singapore maintained the strictest refugee policy of all first asylum nations, and did not accept Vietnamese refugees for resettlement or provide them with temporary asylum. Singaporean authorities refused to permit refugees ashore unless they had a guarantee of onward passage elsewhere within a specified period, and imposed a ceiling on the number of refugees it would accommodate at any one time. The Singapore government regularly turned refugee boats away after resupplying and, if necessary, repairing them. It refused to allow refugees rescued at sea to land unless another country agreed to take them within ninety days (Frost, 1980:355).

**The Philippines**

In contrast to Singapore, the Philippines was arguably the most lenient of all ASEAN nations, accepting all boat people—including those rescued by mercy ships. During the late 1970s relatively few refugee boats attempted to make the arduous 1,500 kilometre journey from Vietnam to the Philippines, so that by the end of 1977 the Philippines had received the smallest number of refugees (1,865 persons) of all ASEAN asylum countries except Singapore. However, as refugees became aware of the increasing difficulties obtaining asylum in Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore, the number of arrivals in the Philippines increased to 6,778 by the end of 1978 (St. Cartmail, 1983:241).

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16 In October 1978 the Singapore government imposed a maximum of 1,000 refugees allowed on its soil at any one time. This was later increased to 2,000 refugees. A further restriction introduced in October 1979 required that all refugees must be resettled within a ninety-day period.

17 Mercy ships were vessels commissioned by voluntary organizations to patrol the South China Sea to assist refugees. Some countries argued that these mercy ships which patrolled off the Vietnamese coast acted as a "pull" factor attracting more Vietnamese to risk taking to the high seas. Some asylum countries would not accept boat people from the mercy ships—e.g. Singapore would only accept boat people rescued by mercy ships if there was a guarantee of resettlement from the ship’s government.
China

China’s policy to allow large-scale settlement of all Vietnamese refugees in the country and not merely provide temporary asylum pending resettlement to third countries, has been unique in the region. The trickle of refugees arriving in China suddenly turned into a flood in 1978, as the Vietnamese government pushed towards a more socialist economy, and targeted capitalist—mainly Chinese—elements of Vietnamese society, as is detailed below.

Hong Kong

Although Hong Kong received a massive influx of Vietnamese refugees immediately following the fall of Saigon, when 3,743 refugees arrived aboard the Danish container ship Clara Maersk after they had been rescued at sea, relatively few attempted the journey from Vietnam before 1978—only 191 arrivals in 1976 and 1,007 in 1977. However, the floodgates opened in 1978 with 8,938 arrivals, with over one-quarter arriving in December (Wain, 1981:74).\(^\text{18}\) Hong Kong’s humanitarian stance of extending refuge to all Vietnamese refugees, together with the hard line being taken elsewhere in South East Asia, meant that the colony became the primary haven for the boat people (Wain, 1981:138).

THE THIRD—OR CHINESE (HOA)—WAVE (1978–1979)

There were two noticeable changes in the exodus of refugees leaving Vietnam in 1978. First, a dramatic increase in the number of persons escaping, and second, a change in the composition of the flow. An average of 7,129 boat people per month arrived in asylum countries during 1978—compared to 437 and 1,035 for the previous two years (Suhrke, 1981:24). In addition, from March 1978, a massive migration of

\(^{18}\) St. Cartmail (1983:194) reported that 6,609 refugees arrived in Hong Kong in 1978.
“land” refugees suddenly erupted. More than 70,000 Hoa arrived in China during April and May alone and by the end of July some 160,000 people had poured north across the Sino-Vietnamese border (Chang, 1982:207).

The composition of the exodus leaving Vietnam also changed from mainly ethnic Vietnamese persons previously connected with the ancien regime who escaped in small groups, to primarily ethnic Chinese (Hoa) merchants and small businessmen who fled in large groups (Suhrke, 1981:26). Nearly all the refugees escaping to China, and sixty per cent of the boat people arriving in Hong Kong, were ethnic Chinese—even though they accounted for only three per cent of the fifty million people in Vietnam (Grant, 1979:113; Wain, 1981:63). Unbeknown to the world at the time, the departure of most ethnic Chinese was a covert operation undertaken by the Vietnamese government, that was exporting people for profit, and which is detailed more fully below.

The discriminatory policies against the Chinese that led to increasing numbers of Hoa leaving Vietnam was, in St. Cartmail’s (1983:69) opinion, not simply the direct result of American intervention in Indochina, nor merely the expression of communist ideology against all capitalists, landowners and other bourgeois elements of society. Instead, he argued it was due to a complex interaction of factors, including a deeply rooted history of animosity between Chinese and Vietnamese, together with the communist government’s move towards socialism that included the elimination of the bourgeois element in Vietnamese society, and the deepening rift between Vietnam and China that eventually erupted in conflict.

A number of authors have argued that the controversy involving ethnic Chinese centred on the issue of assimilation. St. Cartmail (1983:64) argued that the Chinese, especially the Hoa of Cholon, had remained largely unassimilated into the Vietnamese community. Chang (1982:195) also argued that the problem was deeply rooted in the
past. The reunification of Vietnam in 1975 provided an ideal opportunity for the Vietnamese government to finally deal with the unresolved problem of more than one million ethnic Chinese living in southern Vietnam “whose political orientation was at best dubious and whose economic status was considered anachronistic” (Chang, 1982:200). Duiker (1989:58) argued that it was the process of socialist transformation in the South—where the Hoa had traditionally controlled all important aspects of the economy, dominating banking and the production, manufacture and distribution of essential commodities—which initiated the exodus. Many Hoa businesspeople did not assist their cause in this period of shortages and weak economy that followed the war, when they further aggravated the economic situation by hoarding goods and increasing prices. Although there was no immediate effort to change the situation, “an inevitable objective requirement” of the revolution was to abolish the comprador bourgeoisie—especially the Chinese community of Cholon (Nguyen, 1979:1042).

The first signs of change appeared in January 1976, when the government ordered all Chinese residents to register their citizenship as they had declared during Ngo Dinh Diem’s regime—when nearly all were forced to accept Vietnamese citizenship—in what Chang (1982:200) argued was clearly a measure to turn all Chinese into Vietnamese citizens. Those who refused citizenship were heavily taxed.

Chang (1982:195) noted that the first significant change in the status of Chinese living in Vietnam occurred in 1829, when children born from mixed Chinese-Vietnamese marriages (known as Minh Huang) were no longer considered Chinese, but declared Vietnamese subjects. During French rule, heavy taxation was imposed on the Chinese in an attempt to control immigration, and at various times the French allegedly stirred up anti-Chinese feelings among the Vietnamese. However, the most austere anti-Chinese policies were enacted by Ngo Dinh Diem’s regime. First, a nationality law proclaimed on 7 December 1955 which revived pre-colonial policy and declared all children from mixed Chinese-Vietnamese marriages as Vietnamese, and their citizenship could not be renounced. Then, on 21 August 1956, the government forced Vietnamese citizenship upon all Vietnamese-born Chinese, irrespective of their preference. All other ethnic Chinese were considered to be aliens and were required to apply for residential permits (Tran, 1993:28–29). Thirdly, on 6 September 1956 the government issued Decree 56 which prohibited foreigners from engaging in eleven trades, which had been dominated by the Chinese. Those Hoa unwilling to adopt Vietnamese citizenship were threatened with deportation to Taiwan, and some 3,000 out of 52,144 registered Chinese applicants were actually deported before the scheme collapsed (Chang, 1982:1989).

Estimates of the number of ethnic Chinese at the time of reunification vary between 1.2 million and 1.5 million. Duiker (1989:58) claimed that there were 1.5 million, of which all but 200,000 lived in the South.
discriminated against in their occupations, and had their food ration reduced. Later that year the government closed all Chinese language newspapers and all Chinese-run schools.

The following year the government, under the pretext of a national census, ordered all Chinese to complete forms to obtain “citizenship cards”. The government severely punished anyone who failed to obey or retained their Chinese citizenship, by sacking them from their jobs, cancelling their residence registrations, and terminating their food rations (Chang, 1982:201). In addition, the Hoa were prohibited from being employed in the public service or other public enterprises, engaging in retail trades or farming, and were restricted in moving from one place to another. Even some of the ethnic Chinese who had already acquired Vietnamese citizenship were discriminated against. On 25 April 1977, Vietnam passed a nationality law that barred foreign nationals residing in Vietnam from participating in elections and from engaging in six categories of trade (Gilks, 1992:177). In October, as a result of the escalating territorial dispute with China, the Vietnamese government attempted to secure the border area by forcing the Hoa minority who lived in the five northern provinces adjoining the Chinese border to flee into China (Gilks, 1992:177).

In March 1978, the Vietnamese government ordered a complete clamp down on all private business in the country to “shift the bourgeois tradesman to production” and “accelerate the socialist transformation of private capitalist industry and commerce” (Nguyen, 1979:1042–1043). The purge against the “bourgeois trade” was conducted on the eve of 23 March by a special force of police, cadres and students that encircled Cholon and systematically ransacked every shop and businessperson’s house in the area as they compiled an inventory of all assets and goods within the premises (Chanda, 1978b:78). The government compulsorily acquired all goods at cost plus ten per cent profit if receipts were produced, otherwise all goods without the necessary paperwork

21 The six banned trades includes printing, repairing communications and radio and television equipment, driving motor coaches and captaining motor launches (Gilks, 1992:177).
were confiscated. The government reportedly confiscated goods and valuables, including gold and money, from about 50,000 retailers in the city (Chang, 1982:206). In a move aimed to thoroughly destroy the bourgeois character of the economy, the government announced the following morning that all wholesale trades and large business activities were prohibited, forcing some 30,000 enterprises to close down without prior warning, and then again on 31 March that all private traders in the country were banned (Chang, 1982:206). Thousands of people were stripped of their property and means of livelihood and ordered to move to one of the New Economic Zones (NEZ) in remote rural areas.

In addition, refugees reported that Hanoi had forced them to become naturalised, then drafted them into the armed services and sent them to the Cambodia-Vietnam border to fight in frontline attack units. The government punished those who refused by confiscating their identity cards and food rations (St. Cartmail, 1983:78).

On 3 May 1978 the government announced a second currency reform. A single currency unit was introduced for the entire country and all residents were required to exchange old and foreign currencies for the new Vietnamese dong—with limits placed on the amount that could be exchanged, with any surplus simply seized by the government or frozen in the banks. The currency reform, according to Chanda (1978b:81), attempted to level Vietnam's economy by stripping the cash assets from the different classes and placing all families on equal footing. Nguyen (1981:33) claimed that "the changeover caused extreme economic distress, brought on serious food shortages and even famine".

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22 The first currency reform occurred on 21 September 1975, when the old piaster was replaced by the new southern dong—at the rate of one dong for 500 piaster. Each family was allowed to exchange 100,000 piasters for 400 dong and any additional money—up to one million piasters—could be deposited in the bank (Tran, 1993:82).

23 An arbitrary limit of new Dong 100 for old Dong 500 per family in urban areas and new Dong 50 for old Dong 300 in rural areas was imposed on the exchange (Chanda, 1978b:81). Any excess money could be exchanged and deposited in the bank, as long as there was evidence that it was legitimate income (Tran, 1993:86).
Although the Vietnamese government directed the austerity measures against all bourgeois elements of society irrespective of their ethnic background, Chang (1982:207) argued that the Chinese were the principal target of the measures, and the population most affected by the operations.

Beijing denounced the Vietnamese government for forcing people to leave their homes, and was frustrated at Hanoi’s unwillingness to curb the exodus of ethnic Chinese, attempted to stem the flow itself by closing the land border in July 1978 to all refugees except those issued with Chinese entry permits by the Chinese embassy in Hanoi and stamped with exit visas by the Vietnamese government (Gilks, 1992:208; St. Cartmail, 1983:77). As a result, a huge number of ethnic Chinese found themselves in a “no man’s land” situation—refused entry into China on the one side, and unwelcomed in Vietnam on the other. The closure of the frontier between China and Vietnam temporarily halted the land exodus into China, forcing the northern Hoa into boats to sail through the Gulf of Tonkin to China and Hong Kong.

UNHCR statistics on refugee arrivals in the neighbouring South East and East Asian countries show a dramatic increase in the number of refugees arriving by boat from Vietnam. Following the 2,829 refugees who arrived in August 1978—the lowest level in five months—the number of arrivals reached record numbers in successive months: 8,558 in September, 12,540 in October and eventually 21,505 in November, which exceeded the 15,690 who arrived during the entire previous year. The number of arrivals declined in December—the northeast monsoon season—to 13,730 and continued to decline in January 1979, when 9,931 persons arrived, and February, when 8,568 were registered (Wain, 1981:69). Hong Kong Government statistics (1995c) show that eight out of ten Vietnamese refugee arrivals in the colony in 1979 were ethnic Chinese.

Despite the overall decline in refugee arrivals in the region in December, Hong Kong experienced an increase—with over one-quarter of the 8,938 arrivals for 1978 arriving in December (Wain, 1981:74).
The escalation in the rate of refugee arrivals in late 1978 was due, in part, to the arrival of several ocean-going cargo freighters crammed with Vietnamese. It was later revealed that these ships were part of an organised refugee traffic arranged by international racketeers in conjunction with the Vietnamese government.

**RUST BUCKET TOURS INC.**

The transportation of Vietnamese refugees had become “the hottest property in regional trade” according to Wain (1981:17), with hundreds of thousands of people willing to pay, in gold and hard currency, to escape from communist Vietnam. Whereas the flight of refugees before 1978 had been predominantly small, independent escapes, from 1978 they became predominantly large-scale operations involving fare-paying refugees facilitated by government officials “and perhaps even the Hanoi government itself” (Wain, 1981:8). The Hanoi government not only encouraged ethnic Chinese to leave Vietnam, but profited by their departure—first by charging them exit fees, and secondly by confiscating their property after their departure (sometimes even before they had left). The poor standard of vessels used in these operations led Western diplomats in Hanoi to nickname them “Rust Bucket Tours Inc.” (Nguyen-vo, 1992:115).

**Hanoi’s Refugee Machine**

The Hoa exodus was covertly facilitated by the Hanoi government through a section of the political security division of Cong An, or Public Security Bureau (PSB) known as B–2 (Wain, 1981:86). Little is known about the operations of the PSB, other than they were responsible for internal and external aspects of security. Grant (1979:108) and Stern (1984:300) both agreed that PSB’s refugee processing operations could only have been assembled with the authorisation of key Politburo and Central Committee Organisation Department officials because it was an important and sensitive agency within the Interior Ministry. Overall responsibility for Hanoi’s “refugee machine” was attributed to the Minister of Interior, Tran Quoc Hoan, while the person
in charge of the trafficking in southern Vietnam trafficking was claimed to be Mai Chi Hoa, the brother of Le Duc Tho\textsuperscript{25} (Pointing the finger at Hanoi, 1979:20; Wain, 1981:106).

There were three reasons, according to Nguyen (1981:48), why the communists encouraged the Chinese to escape by boat. First, to avoid a concentration of Hoa dissenters trying to flee Vietnam along the Sino-Vietnamese border, where hostilities had already begun. Second, to relieve internal pressure brought on by the confiscation of Chinese-owned businesses. Third, to collect gold.

The PSB scheme, which probably commenced sometime in early 1978, relied heavily on a network of “state approved” intermediaries in the tightly knit Chinese commercial sector who had extensive contacts with other Chinese throughout Vietnam and South East Asia. Initially the procedure for organising a departure was a complex affair, taking up to a year to complete, but as the system was streamlined the wait for departure was reduced to as little as one month.

The escape process varied considerably between different areas, especially between northern and southern parts of the country. In his description of a typical escape from the south, Grant (1979:112) stated that the first step was for an individual or group of Chinese to buy a boat, usually a wooden river or coastal fishing vessel or other such workhorse, often in poor condition, and always at highly inflated prices. Boats were extremely expensive, whether motorised or not. Wain (1981:99) stated that a 60-ton wooden vessel with engine cost the equivalent of US$59,000, while an unseaworthy 35 ton sailing junk cost US$22,700. One group reputedly paid 80 taels of gold to buy an old river transport vessel, and a further 220 taels to modify it for the sea voyage (Wain, 1981:92).\textsuperscript{26} The refitted refugee boats were distinguishable from other

\textsuperscript{25} Le Duc Tho was the North Vietnamese diplomat and special negotiator at the Paris Peace talks. He was co-recipient of the 1973 Nobel Prize for Peace—with Henry Kissenger—but declined the prize.

\textsuperscript{26} A tael is a Chinese unit of weight equal to 1.21 troy ounces or 37.79 grams. One tael was valued at about US$250 in 1978, but doubled to more than US$500 in 1979 (Wain, 1979:170).
vessels, according to Wain (1981:89), by canvas shelters on the foredeck, toilets and a
small cooking area over the stern, and large-mouthed ventilation pipes on the deck to
force air to the decks below, where refugees sat crowded in narrow racks resembling
church pews. Once refitted, the vessel was then equipped with fuel, food and other
supplies for its forthcoming journey, again at heavily increased prices on the black
market. Following the purchase of the boat the middlemen would select a departure
point and negotiate with the regional PSB officials about access to the boat, the number
of intended passengers, and the charge for the departure—which varied considerably,
depending on negotiations between the officials and the organisers (Wain, 1981:86).
Besides the negotiated payment, the PSB officers regularly sought, and received, bribes
for their services, paid in gold, jewellery, furniture and virtually anything of value.
These bribes were not declared or passed on to the government (Wain, 1981:87).
Once negotiations were completed the future refugees would pay the
intermediary an application or registration fee—about two taels of gold per adult—for
their names to be submitted to the PSB. The remainder of the payment, looked upon as
a departure tax, was usually made near embarkation. The list of prospective passengers,
together with their identity papers—either an old South Vietnamese government identity
card or a 1976 voter’s registration card issued by the Communist administration, or a
birth certificate for children—was then submitted to the PSB by the intermediaries. The
security police would screen the applicants, register those who qualified, and file
biographical details of household heads and adult males, who were also photographed
and fingerprinted. The prospective refugees were required to declare all their gold and
jewellery, and all valuables—except for two taels of gold—were confiscated. In
addition, some passengers were forced to sign declarations “donating” their possessions
to the state (Grant, 1979:112; Wain, 1981:88).
The fare paid by each passenger varied according to their ability to pay,
relationship to the boat organisers, the honesty of officials, middlemen and the boat
owners, and the availability of boats and their place in the queue of departures. The
currency of the boat people was gold, and the going rate for adult passengers in 1978 ranged between eight and ten *taels* of gold, with children aged five to fifteen paying half the adult fare and children under five travelling free. According to information Grant (1979:110) obtained from refugees, about half of each fare was paid to the government as registration and departure taxes, with the remainder spent on buying, modifying and equipping the boat, and on bribes, and anything left over was profit to the boat owner and organisers.

In the north the government was less insistent upon collecting large departure taxes, which Grant (1979:114) attributed to Hanoi being more resolute in removing the ethnic Chinese minority due to escalating tensions with China. He also pointed out that the Chinese were not only more numerous in the south, but also much wealthier, with their caches of hidden gold and therefore in a much better position to pay to leave. In contrast, the northern Chinese had been living under socialism for more than twenty years, and were not as wealthy as their southern relatives. Examples of the costs involved for northern Hoa to leave Vietnam included one group of about 150 that paid a total of 7800 *dong* ($2228), with each refugee contributing about 50 *dong*, which Grant (1979:114) calculated was less than a month’s wages for an average worker, while a second group of more than one hundred paid over 40,000 *dong* ($11,429) in total or about 400 *dong* ($114) each, which was equivalent to eight months’ wages for the average worker.

The ethnic Chinese in northern Vietnam were subjected to considerable intimidation by PSB officials to leave Vietnam, such as being threatened with relocation to a NEZ if they did not leave. Neither the government nor the police bothered to conceal their role in the trafficking operation in the North (Wain, 1981:99).

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27 The buying and hoarding of gold, either in gold bars or jewellery, had become common practice by many people—particularly the wealthy—during South Vietnam’s long period of economic instability brought on by the war (Nguyen, 1981:33).
In central Vietnam the government was more directly involved in the trafficking than in the South, apparently in an effort to hasten the exit of ethnic Chinese. Although considerable intimidation was used to force the Hoa to leave, the pressures were not as intense as in the North. The greater government involvement resulted in “fewer middlemen, lower boat fares, organised land transport and few ethnic Vietnamese in the boat” (Wain, 1981:97).

The local PSB officials determined the date, time and place of departure, and informed the organiser a few days beforehand. The principal departure ports in the South were Rach Gia, Long Thanh, Vung Tau, My Tho, Vinh Long, Tra Vinh, Can Tho, Bac Lieu and Ca Mau, as well as a number of smaller towns and ports in between, while the two approved departure points in the North were Hai Phong—the main port of northern Vietnam—and Hong Gai in Quang Ninh province adjoing China (Wain, 1981:85). The passengers then had to assemble at transit camps near the embarkation point, which Wain (1981:88) stated was the most difficult part of the pre-departure operation, as the refugees had no official transportation, or legal travel documents. As there was no coordination between authorities in different provinces, or between the different branches of government, the refugees were vulnerable to arrest by officials not connected with their organised departure, until they arrived at the transit place. As Wain (1981:93) stated, the fewer provincial boundaries to cross, the less likely it was to “run afoul of the vagaries of the Vietnamese government bureaucracy”.

When it was time to load the passengers, PSB officers would check their name and photographs as they boarded. The PSB frequently placed additional passengers aboard the vessels, above the load planned by the intermediary. Not only did this overcrowd vessels to dangerously high levels, but it also reduced the food and water rations significantly. It was the PSB officials who benefited from these additional passengers, as the money went directly to the PSB officials themselves, without being split with the middlemen, or passed on to the government (Wain, 1981:90–91).
The refugee boats were often escorted out to sea by PSB vessels, to ensure their safe passage past other PSB and border-defence craft that guarded the harbours and coastal waters for unauthorised departures, and state-owned fishing vessels manned by armed border-defence units that patrolled further offshore. The officials kept an attentive vigil for unauthorised escapes as they received a share of the money and valuables confiscated from those who were apprehended. The unsanctioned voyages were generally small groups of ethnic Vietnamese. Those caught trying to elude the approved PSB system were charged with illegal departure, stripped of their possessions, and generally gaol (Wain, 1981:90).

Besides the Chinese businessmen and petty traders from around Ho Chi Minh City—who constituted the majority of persons escaping in 1978—small numbers of ethnic Vietnamese escaped by impersonating Hoa, using false identification papers obtained on the black market or through the brokers (Nguyen, 1981). They were charged a fifty per cent premium to be transported aboard the organised escape vessels (Wain, 1981:89–90).

Besides the boat escapes there were also secret organizations that ferried people to China after the closure of the Sino-Vietnamese border in July 1978. According to refugee accounts obtained by Wain (1981:102) there was little evidence to suggest direct government involvement in the overland journeys. The ethnic Chinese organisers arranged train travel from Ho Chi Minh City to Hanoi and the appropriate travel documents, together with guides, shelter and food for the journey from the capital to the border. Many refugees elected to go overland rather than by boat simply because it was cheaper, with the cost of the overland journey ranging from US$500 to more than US$1100. Others were deterred from making the sea voyage because of the stories of overcrowding and of vessels being lost in the South China Sea. Many Vietnamese travelled to China in the belief that after a brief transit period they would be able to travel on to Hong Kong and then apply for resettlement as refugees in the West.
However, Beijing, UNHCR and the major resettlement countries all considered that their place of settlement was in China (Wain, 1981:136).28

The appeal of the overland journey to China diminished when the Vietnamese discovered that they would have to remain in China permanently (Wain, 1981:102). Not everyone wanted to remain in China, with some returning to northern Vietnam where they joined departures from Hai Phong or Hon Gai, while others escaped by junk from China, and made their way to Hong Kong. The number involved in this secondary migration from China to Hong Kong and Macau was estimated by Casella (1985:20) to be less than five per cent of the total refugee population. The Hong Kong authorities did not permit these “two time” refugees—who spent time in China—to remain, even temporarily, in the colony and returned them to the People’s Republic of China. Many refugees attempted to enter Hong Kong and Macau a number of times, but were returned. Kerpen (1987:49) reported that some 20,000 persons were returned to China in 1980–1981.

The Big Boat Trade

The trafficking of Vietnamese refugees became an even bigger international, and more profitable, conspiracy when decrepit, foreign-registered freighters transported thousands of refugees in crowded and squalid conditions from late 1978 to early 1979, in what St. Cartmail (1983:98) labelled the “Big Boat Trade”.29 The first known voyage began in September 1978 when the 950 tonne, Singapore-owned, Honduras-registered, freighter Southern Cross lay anchored in the Saigon River estuary as three Vietnamese fishing trawlers—each almost overflowing with men, women and children, and towing people-laden barges—disgorged their load of 690 adults and 560 children onto the

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28 Many Vietnamese who initially settled in China did later flee to Hong Kong. They were labelled as Ex-China Vietnamese Illegal Immigrants (ECVII). (See Skeldon, 1994:97).

29 The details of, and behind, the voyages of the Southern Cross, Hai Hong, Huey Fong, Tung An and Skyluck have been thoroughly reconstructed by Grant (1979:108–133), Wain (1981:16–34) and St. Cartmail (1983:98–110).
freighter in a pre-planned manoeuvre (Grant, 1979:119). It was apparent to *Southern Cross* crew-members later interviewed, that the loading had occurred with some sort of official Vietnamese sanction, as the ship was taken to and from its berth by a Vietnamese pilot, where armed soldiers guarded the wharf, and meetings were held with Vietnamese civilians (Grant, 1979:119). After the passengers were aboard, the ship quietly made its way out to international waters, where the ship’s captain radioed a message stating that hundreds of refugees had swarmed aboard from four large fishing junks, and then set course for Malaysia. When the ship arrived in Malaysia a few days later it was refused permission to land. It continued on to Indonesia where it was deliberately beached at Pengibu Island. Following assurances of resettlement by the United States, Canada and Australia, the refugees were moved to U.N. refugee camps on the island of Bintan, where the passengers passed themselves off as refugees. The profit from the venture for the Singaporean organisers was reputedly 700 *taels* of gold or approximately US$210,000 (Grant, 1979:121).

The pioneering journey of the *Southern Cross* had been so successful, and profitable for the organisers, that another operation was conducted in late October involving the *Hai Hong*, a rusting, old 1,600 tonne tramp steamer that had been bought specifically for one final voyage to carry the new and lucrative Asian cargo. However, the voyage of the *Hai Hong*, according to Wain (1981:21–23), was plagued with difficulties from the outset. When the ship arrived in Vietnam it had expected to load a cargo of 1,200 refugees, but was forced to load an additional 1,300 persons—free of charge—by the local Vietnamese authorities under threat of detention. The ship had originally intended to off-load its cargo in Hong Kong, but the passage north was obstructed by Typhoon Rita, so the ship turned south to waters better known by the Indonesian captain. On October 31, the *Hai Hong* arrived in the Indonesian harbour of Taremba—the main port on the island of Siantan in the Anabas group. The following day, the *Hai Hong*’s captain radioed UNHCR regional headquarters in Kuala Lumpur requesting assistance for the 2,500 or more refugees who he reported had boarded the
ship when it was anchored in the Paracel Islands with engine trouble. However, Indonesian officials became suspicious after interviewing the captain, and noticed discrepancies in his story, which Wain (1981:24) claimed was “full of holes”. The authorities questioned the likelihood of 2,500 people gathering in one place in the middle of the South China Sea, 360 kilometres from the coast of Vietnam; why the Hai Hong had taken a week or more to reach the Paracel Islands, when it only takes eight days to travel from Singapore to Hong Kong, which is twice the distance; and what were the refugees doing at Paracel Islands, which are off-course the normal southern and western routes taken by Vietnamese refugees. In view of the doubts that existed, and with the realisation that they had previously been duped with the Southern Cross, the Indonesian government refused permission for the Hai Hong to unload its passengers, and ordered the ship out of Indonesian waters.

Indonesia’s decision to expel the Hai Hong caused the organisers considerable anguish, as it appeared that all other countries in the region would follow suit and refuse permission for the ship to dock. With few options, and the passengers becoming restless after spending seventeen days crowded aboard the ship, the captain dropped anchor off Malaysia’s Port Klang on 9 November 1978. Malaysian officials, while willing to provide food, water and medical supplies, insisted that the ship should leave, stating “that the captain was trying to cover a planned migration of a sizeable number of people from Vietnam” (Wain, 1981:30). However, the captain refused to move, and a stand-off continued throughout November as authorities questioned whether the Vietnamese were refugees, and if so, what to do with them. The stalemate eventually ended with UNHCR declaring that the Vietnamese aboard the Hai Hong were refugees, and resettlement places were guaranteed for them in the West.

Wain (1981:26) argued that the Hai Hong affair, and the realisation that Vietnamese authorities may have been involved in the trafficking of refugees, had serious and long-term implications on the entire Indochinese refugee resettlement program. The suspected involvement of Vietnamese officials in the export of ethnic
Chinese raised the question whether those Vietnamese who left in such circumstances should be classified as refugees, and receive the assistance and protection of the international community through the UNHCR. According to Wain (1981:28), the Australian government was particularly fearful that the arrival of a succession of packed freighters with thousands of “would-be refugees” on South East Asian shores would swamp the existing Indochinese refugee resettlement scheme causing it to collapse and result in the ASEAN asylum nations refusing to accept additional refugees. What worried the Australians even more was the possibility that if the ASEAN countries did not allow the refugee boats to land, the Vietnamese would continue south and land on their northern shores. As Australia was a signatory to the UNHCR declarations, unlike the ASEAN countries, it could not turn any refugee boats away and would be forced to accept the boat people.30 There had already been considerable public outcry in Australia at the arrival of a number of small refugee boats in Darwin and any large-scale arrival was destined to cause further opposition against the immigration of Asian refugees. The Australian government lobbied UNHCR to reject the Hai Hong passengers as refugees, hoping to deter any future large shipments of “would-be refugees” (Wain, 1981:33).

The UNHCR Regional Representative in Malaysia, Rajagopalam Sampatkumar, was reported by Wain (1981:33) to have initially agreed with the Australian argument and was willing to make a favourable judgement on the matter, but suddenly reversed his opinion overnight and proclaimed that the Vietnamese aboard the Hai Hong were refugees. Wain (1981:33) correctly predicted that the UNHCR judgement would have had a profound effect on all Vietnamese refugees—not just those aboard the Hai Hong, but all those Vietnamese who were to leave their country in the future. The decision signalled that irrespective of what first-asylum and other countries considered of the Vietnamese boat people, the UNHCR would consider them as refugees, and for the next

decade all Vietnamese boat people who arrived in first-asylum countries were automatically granted refugee status.\(^{31}\)

On 23 December 1978, an ageing Panamanian-registered cargo ship named the *Huey Fang* steamed into Hong Kong harbour with 3,318 mostly ethnic Chinese men, women and children aboard. The authorities in Hong Kong, their suspicions aroused by the previous adventures of the *Southern Cross* and the *Hai Hong*, later interviewed the captain and crew. Hong Kong authorities charged twelve men on 7 February with “conspiracy to defraud the Hong Kong government by bringing refugees in by ‘illegal pretence’ after 3,273 *taels* of gold worth in excess of $800,000 was discovered in the engine room of the *Huey Fang*” (Grant, 1979:124; Wain, 1981:103).\(^{32}\) The trial of the eleven *Huey Fong* accomplices—one of those charged was given immunity from prosecution in exchange for his testimony—revealed the conspiracy involved ethnic-Chinese businessmen and the Vietnamese government. The eleven were all found guilty and sentenced to between fifteen months and seven years imprisonment (Grant, 1979:127).

The trial revealed that 1,700 adult passengers had paid an average of twelve *taels* of gold each for their passage from Vietnam, and children under sixteen years, one *tael*—with five-sixths of each adult fare going to the Vietnamese authorities and the remaining two *taels* to the business syndicate for arranging the transport. Wain (1981:103) calculated that Hanoi’s share of the venture was more than US$4,000,000, not including the value of property confiscated from the passengers. The testimonies of Tiet Quoc Lien, the accused *Viet hoa* businessman, and Kwok Wah-leung, a Hong Kong businessman, both confirmed the Vietnamese government’s involvement in the refugee outflow (Wain, 1981:104). The Hong Kong government reported “that the Vietnamese

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31 This automatic refugee status continued until the introduction of the Comprehensive Plan of Action in 1989, when all Vietnamese were screened to prove that they were in fact refugees.

32 Those charged included the captain, six of the ship’s officers, four Chinese businessmen from Hong Kong with connections in Vietnam, and an ethnic Chinese from southern Vietnam.
authorities were prepared to ‘export’, as unassimilable politically and economically, a large proportion of the country’s population” (Davis, 1991:4–5).

The British government was concerned with the continued arrival of refugee-laden freighters in Hong Kong, such as the Skyluck, with 2,630 Vietnamese refugees aboard, and the Sen On, which ran aground on Lantau Island with 1,400 Vietnamese aboard, and the evidence that suggested Vietnamese government involvement in the scheme. In an attempt to deter the arrival of further freighters, the Hong Kong government introduced strict legislation with heavy penalties for those convicted of trafficking in refugees. The British Foreign Office in London reportedly summoned the Vietnamese ambassador to deliver a strong protest about Vietnamese government involvement in the trafficking of Vietnamese refugees (Grant, 1979:130).

There is little doubt that the Vietnamese government was actively involved in the organised trade of predominately ethnic Chinese refugees out of the country during 1978 and 1979. Grant (1979:132) stated that the evidence of thousands of refugees concerning government involvement, together with the physical evidence of the freighters and the testimonies of their crew, “is too strong to be denied”. The extent of the trade is not known exactly, but Grant (1979:133) estimated that Hanoi made hundreds of millions of dollars from the scheme while all the time denying they were involved. However, this veil of secrecy surrounding the expulsion of the ethnic Chinese slipped in 1979, as the Vietnamese government increased the momentum to remove the Hoa from Vietnam.

The “refugee machine” was arguably the most buoyant part of the Vietnamese economy—and a major source of foreign exchange to the government—supposedly surpassing coal as the largest export earner in 1979 (Wain, 1981:105). It was estimated

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33 The Hong Kong Merchant Shipping (Amendment) Bill of 1979 was introduced to deal with the Huey Fong and deter others attempts. It increased prison sentences to four years. Under the Immigration (Amendment) (No.3) Bill of 1979, the owner, agent, captain and crew of a ship carrying illegal immigrants to Hong Kong and anyone making arrangements for the voyage, were liable to a fine of HK$1 million and imprisonment for life (Wain, 1981:110).
that Hanoi earned more than US$115 million in the year preceding June 1979 through taxing refugee departures and organising the traffic—which accounted for 2.5 per cent of gross national product (Rachagan, 1987:253). The boat building and repair industry benefited greatly from the trade, with thousands of boats either built or modified to carry the human cargo. The Chinese businessmen also made significant financial gains from organising their kinsmen to escape and the black market flourished, supplying everything from boats and marine engines, false travel and identity documents, to the fuel and provisions for the journey, and all at exorbitant prices.

THE EXODUS OF 1979

The number of people fleeing Vietnam exploded in 1979, primarily due to China’s invasion of northern Vietnam in February. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the Vietnamese government—fearing a second Chinese attack—reacted severely on the Hoa population by removing them from along the northern border and the major cities.34 Wain (1981:77) stated that anti-Chinese sentiments in government circles were rife, especially in northern Vietnam, where ethnic Chinese were thrown out of the Communist Party, and dismissed from the armed forces and government employment, with employers told not to hire them. In addition, their food rations were stopped, and in some cases they were restricted by curfews. The ethnic Chinese were continually harassed by security officials, who door-knocked to deliver the ultimatum—move to a NEZ or leave the country—or to question the residents on why they were taking so long to leave. This pressure was maintained through loudspeaker warnings and regular house meetings in the streets where the Hoa lived (Wain, 1981:77–78). Hanoi’s policy was labelled by St. Cartmail (1983:69) as a game of “refugee roulette,” in which the Chinese had the choice between suffering extreme hardships in the NEZs, or risk drowning at sea when escaping Vietnam.

34 It is necessary to emphasise that the anti-Chinese sentiment in northern Vietnam was not initiated by spontaneous public opinion but rather ignited by the Vietnamese government.
Hanoi’s anti-Chinese policy immediately resulted in a dramatic increase in the number of refugees leaving the country. Over 200,000 refugees arrived in China by February 1979, and they continued to enter at the rate of 10,000 a month, reaching 235,000 by June and more than 250,000 by late July (Wain, 1981:136). A tidal wave of mostly ethnic Chinese refugees swept across the asylum countries in 1979: 13,423 boat people arrived in March, 26,602 persons in April, 51,139 in May and 56,941 in June (Wain, 1981:78–79). The dramatic and sudden increase in refugee numbers placed enormous strains on the first asylum nations.

The First Asylum Countries

The number of refugees arriving in the ASEAN countries steadily increased to record levels during the first six months of 1979, despite the deterrents imposed by many of their governments. By the end of June an estimated 107,331 refugees had arrived in the five ASEAN states, 56,421 in Hong Kong and 4,756 in other countries, including 292 in Australia. The brunt of the Vietnamese refugee burden in South East Asia was borne by Malaysia (47,688 refugees) and Indonesia (42,726), with Thailand (11,546) a distant third (Table 3.1) (Frost, 1980:354).

By mid-1979 the refugee exodus had created a problem of crisis proportions, as arrivals sky-rocketed to record levels that far exceeded the meagre resettlement to the West. Frost (1980:357) argued that the over-burdened asylum nations were “frustrated with the inconsistent and hypocritical” Western attitudes that implored Asian asylum states to accept “without question” all refugees who arrived on their shores as temporary residents, yet who insisted on screening and processing refugees to be accepted.

The increase in refugee arrivals created considerable resentment in virtually all the asylum countries, as native people living around the camps—most who lived in

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35 This figure does not include asylum-seekers not registered with UNHCR.

36 In the first six months of 1979, 275 boats carrying more than 41,000 Vietnamese had been intercepted and towed back out to sea by Malaysian patrols (Frost, 1980:357).
extreme poverty—witnessed refugees receive special treatment and care upon their arrival, yet make no visible contribution to society. Awanohara (cited in Hugo, 1987:248) stated that “the refugees have a higher standard of living than many Indonesians living in nearby areas ... [being] guaranteed food, water, medical and other welfare facilities, education, and on top of that resettlement in rich countries”. The situation was further exacerbated by the prices of local food and supplies being driven up, which locals blamed on UNHCR for purchasing local goods for the refugees (Frost, 1980:355).

Table 3.1
Refugee Arrivals in Countries of First Asylum, January–October 1979

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COUNTRY</th>
<th>JAN</th>
<th>FEB</th>
<th>MAR</th>
<th>APR</th>
<th>MAY</th>
<th>JUN</th>
<th>JUL</th>
<th>AUG</th>
<th>SEP</th>
<th>OCT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>4,202</td>
<td>3,166</td>
<td>6,033</td>
<td>13,250</td>
<td>17,508</td>
<td>3,529</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>3,499&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>960</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>1,831</td>
<td>406</td>
<td>3,101</td>
<td>4,610</td>
<td>10,035</td>
<td>22,743</td>
<td>3,876</td>
<td>813</td>
<td>434</td>
<td>329</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>802</td>
<td>254</td>
<td>476</td>
<td>814</td>
<td>2,191</td>
<td>1,149</td>
<td>473</td>
<td>1,053</td>
<td>410</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>266</td>
<td>317</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>1,262</td>
<td>1,552</td>
<td>1,307</td>
<td>574</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>3,151</td>
<td>2,901</td>
<td>3,114</td>
<td>5,702</td>
<td>18,718</td>
<td>22,835</td>
<td>8,768</td>
<td>2,975&lt;sup&gt;3a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>2,673&lt;sup&gt;3b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>686</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>467</td>
<td>996</td>
<td>620</td>
<td>1,471</td>
<td>2,780</td>
<td>2,432</td>
<td>709</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>248</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>341</td>
<td>1,301</td>
<td>1,106</td>
<td>967</td>
<td>669</td>
<td>446</td>
<td>630</td>
<td>492</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total boat refugees</td>
<td>9,931</td>
<td>8,568</td>
<td>13,423</td>
<td>26,602</td>
<td>51,139</td>
<td>54,500</td>
<td>16,210</td>
<td>6,770</td>
<td>9,666</td>
<td>3,260</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:
1. These figures do not take into account those refugees still not registered at UNHCR or Hong Kong government camps. Refugees rescued at sea are included under countries of first asylum.
2. 577 arrivals and 2,922 persons who had arrived in the previous months on Malaysia beaches and were transferred to UNHCR camps in September.
3. Of whom (a) 2,499 arrivals and (b) 1,723 arrivals purporting to come from northern Vietnam under investigation as having previously been resettled in China.

The increase in refugee numbers was not the only worry to the ASEAN first asylum countries. The high proportion of ethnic Chinese in the refugee inflow, which at times reached between sixty and seventy per cent, was of particular concern to the asylum countries of South East Asia, which—except for Singapore, where ethnic Chinese predominated—all had ethnic Chinese minorities. The arrival of the ethnic Chinese refugees was seen as a potential threat that could upset “the complex ethnic balances in each of the asylum countries” (Wain, 1981, 123–124).

Malaysia

The ethnic situation was most delicate in Malaysia, where ethnic unrest between Malays and Chinese had erupted many times throughout the twentieth century. The arrival of ethnic Chinese refugees therefore became a “very sensitive political issue”, as it threatened to further weaken the strength of the indigenous Malay population, who constituted less than a half (46%) of the country’s population, and strengthen the Chinese minority, who accounted for slightly more than a third (34%) (Wientraub, 1977:30). The influx of Viet hoa refugees became highly unpopular with residents of the east coast states, leading to hostile Malay villagers attacking a number of boats attempting to land. One political observer interviewed by St. Cartmail (1983:225) blamed the PAS—Malaysia’s Islamic extremist party—for turning the east coast villagers against the mainly ethnic Chinese boat people. Conservative Muslim political groups pressured the government to keep the Chinese refugees out of Malaysia. It was argued that the distinctive cultural and religious differences between the Malays and the ethnic Chinese refugees caused a serious threat to national security, with refugee arrivals intensifying interethnic conflicts that could lead to further outbreaks of violence and popular insurrection (Sodhy; Lim and Porpora cited in Lavoie and Knock, 1990:48). Faced with the threat of popular unrest against the “Chinese peril”, the government refused entry to ethnic Chinese refugees (Von Der Mehden cited in Lavoie and Knock, 1990:48).
**Indonesia**

Indonesia was also concerned at the high proportion of ethnic Chinese among the boat people, which Osborne (1980:50) argued was “the logical extension of its long history of racial discrimination against the Chinese in Indonesia”. Indonesia still harboured resentment toward the Chinese from the abortive 1965 pro-Communist coup, in which tens of thousands of ethnic Chinese were killed in the aftermath.\(^{37}\) Although Indonesia had only a small ethnic Chinese minority of around three per cent of the population, the influx of predominantly ethnic Chinese refugees was regarded as a potential threat that could destabilise the political and social fabric of the country (Lavoie and Knock, 1990:46). A major concern was that subversives from China might slip into the country as part of the refugee flood and undermine state security.

**Thailand**

Even in Thailand—where the Chinese are the most integrated of all South East Asian Chinese communities—there was, according to Lavoie and Knock (1990:47), widespread dislike of the Chinese minority, and historical animosity against the Vietnamese. Whereas Laotian and, to a lesser extent, Khmer refugees were sympathetically received in Thailand because they shared similar ethnicities and cultural values, there was considerable resentment by the Thais of the Vietnamese and ethnic Chinese.\(^{38}\) This can be attributed to the presence of “fifth column” guerilla groups previously being stationed in Thailand—the Chinese during the Second World War and the Vietnamese during the Vietnam War. The arrival of large numbers of Vietnamese refugees threatened Thai tolerance of these ethnic groups (Lavoie and Knock, 1990:47).

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\(^{37}\) There was a tendency by Indonesia’s right wing to identify the Chinese minority with the Indonesian PKI (*Partai Komunis Indonesia*).

\(^{38}\) Although there are some cultural similarities between the Thais and the Khmer, there is considerable historical animosity. The Thai National Security Council considered that the Khmer refugees, while destabilising, would form a partial temporary barrier to the Khmer Rouge.
Thai officials were particularly concerned that local resentment of the refugees could ignite anti-government feelings in rural areas.

**China**

The mass arrival of refugees in China caused enormous difficulties in the already overpopulated border towns and villages, so the Chinese government resettled the majority of refugees to subsidised state farms in the southern provinces, rather than to already crowded urban areas, or communes without the resources to absorb them (Obrecht, 1983:30–31). The settlement and subsequent assimilation of the refugees were assisted by the fact that more than ninety per cent of the refugees were of ethnic Chinese origin from northern Vietnam, most of whom spoke Cantonese.

**Hong Kong**

The arrival of large numbers of refugees in Hong Kong placed severe pressures on the already crowded situation. The former Crown colony also had to contend with large numbers of illegal immigrants from China, estimated at more than 630,000 in a ten year period, besides the Vietnamese refugees (Davis, 1991:2). Many people argue that Hong Kong practised a very discriminatory immigration policy in that it accepted refugees from Vietnam, yet immediately repatriated all illegal immigrants from mainland China, many of whom had close family links in Hong Kong (Davis, 1991:2).

Hong Kong was particularly concerned with the issue of resettlement—or more precisely—the lack of it. While Hong Kong received 35 per cent of all Vietnamese boat people, only 13 per cent of all resettlement places emanated from there (Davis, 1991:7). In the first seven months of 1979, more than 65,000 Vietnamese had arrived in Hong Kong, yet just over 5,000 people were resettled. The crisis was most severe in May and June, when arrivals reached 18,688 and 19,651 persons respectively, but only 499 and 1,608 Vietnamese were resettled (St. Cartmail, 1983:194). Sir Murray MacLehose, Hong Kong’s Governor, accused the resettlement countries of “rewarding inhumanity” by taking so many refugees from Malaysia—where the resettlement rate was 15 persons
resettled per 100 arrivals—and so few from Hong Kong, where the rate some months was as low as one per 100 (Bowring, 1979:25; Lee, 1979:18).

**Human Deterrence Policies**

The increase in refugee arrivals, and policies developed to attempt to deter the refugees, caused considerable tension between ASEAN member states. The deluge of more than 40,000 refugees into Indonesia was directly influenced by Malaysia’s “push-off” policy, with approximately eighty per cent of Vietnamese arrivals having previously attempted to land in Malaysia (Hugo, 1987:247). The Malaysian policy placed an increasing burden on Indonesia and strained relations between the ASEAN member nations, with Indonesia’s Foreign Minister, Mochtar Kusumaatmadja, stating “that the Malaysians must not push their refugees out to sea since their subsequent arrival in Indonesia is causing grave problems” (Frost, 1980:359). The dramatic increase in refugee arrivals resulted in the Indonesian government declaring on 12 June 1979 that it would accept no more refugees for first asylum. It later stated that it would mount a naval blockade to turn all refugee boats towards Hong Kong (Osborne, 1980:50; St. Cartmail, 1983:244).

In mid-June, Thailand and Malaysia also declared strict new refugee policies aimed at deterring refugee arrivals. Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister, Dr Mahathir bin Mohamed, announced on 12 June 1979 that his country would no longer accept Vietnamese refugees and would expel all who sought to enter, and shoot refugees if they ignored warnings to stay away (Osborne, 1980:49). Thai Prime Minister, General Kriangsak Chomanand, also proclaimed that Thailand would accept no more refugees, and on 18 June 1979 advised a U.N. Special Envoy that it would refuse to accept additional refugees, “no matter what other countries might say” (Frost, 1980:360). The rejection of temporary asylum—with refugees refused permission to land and pushed back to sea, where thousands drowned—was viewed by Kumin (1987:9) as the most dramatic denial of asylum the world had witnessed since World War II.
The ASEAN forum was used with considerable success in early 1979 to bring the refugee problem to the world’s attention. At a meeting in Bangkok on 12–13 January 1979, the ASEAN foreign ministers expressed their “grave concern” at the increasing numbers of refugees arriving on their shores, and that any continuation of this flow would seriously affect the stability in the region. They directly challenged the Vietnamese government to “take appropriate measures to tackle the problem at the source” (Frost, 1980:360). On 21 February 1979, the ASEAN Standing Committee adopted the proposal to establish refugee processing centres on islands in Indonesia and the Philippines (Frost, 1980:359). The ASEAN member-states used their Foreign Ministers’ meeting in Bali at the end of the month to press for additional international recognition of the refugee problem following the mid-June announcements from Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia that they would not accept any more refugees. ASEAN, which regarded Hanoi as the source of the refugee problem, was eager to gather international support in its campaign to pressure Vietnam into turning off the refugee tap. Successive Foreign Ministers, including Malaysia’s Dr. Mochtar, Philippines’ General Romulo, and Singapore’s S. Rajaratnam, all criticised Vietnam’s role in the exodus. In a joint communiqué issued by the Foreign Ministers, they expressed

their grave concern over the deluge of illegal immigrants [and] displaced persons ... from Indochina which had reached crisis proportions and caused severe political, socio-economic and security problems in ASEAN countries and will have a destabilising effect on the region. (Frost, 1980:361)

The Ministers appealed to the international community to prevail upon Vietnam to stop the exodus, and sought additional financial support for its refugee programs, and guarantees from the developed countries to resettle more refugees already in South East Asian camps.
Notice was served by the Ministers that unless their refugee burden were either resettled or reaccepted by the Indochina countries “within a reasonable time frame” they would send out the “illegal immigrants” (Frost, 1980:361).

Meanwhile, Hong Kong’s Governor, Sir Murray MacLehose, visited London, New York, Washington and Geneva in mid-June to report on the extent of the refugee problem and warn that the number of people coming out of Vietnam was straining the humanity of nearby countries to breaking point and that “if nothing effective was done internationally, patience in the recipient territories could snap, with disastrous results” (Davis, 1991:7).

THE 1979 GENEVA CONFERENCE

The first Geneva Conference on Indochinese Refugees was held on 11-12 December 1978 and attended by 38 governments. The meeting was widely considered a failure, as Vietnam stated it was powerless to stop the exodus; the first asylum countries refused to pledge safe haven without guarantees of resettlement; and Western countries would not provide adequate resettlement quotas to absorb the increasing refugee flow (Kumin, 1987:14).39

A second international conference to deal with all aspects of the refugee problem was initially proposed by British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in May 1979, and was later endorsed by the ASEAN Foreign Ministers’ meeting and a number of resettlement countries. After considerable consultation, the United Nations Secretary-General, Kurt Waldheim, agreed to convene a second international conference to discuss the refugee problem in Geneva on 20 July 1979. The U.N. Meeting on Refugees and Displaced Persons from Indochina—attended by 65 countries and chaired by the U.N.

39 At the conference Western governments increased resettlement places from 53,500 to 125,000 for the ensuing twelve months (Stein, 1979b:717).
Secretary-General himself—was viewed by Frost (1980:362) as “the turning point in the international effort to develop an effective response to the plight of the boat people”.

The ASEAN states had proposed that the Geneva meeting should discuss all aspects of the refugee problem, including solution at the source. However, a precondition for Vietnam’s attendance at the conference was that it should be limited to humanitarian aspects of the problem. Consequently, a “burden sharing approach” was adopted aimed at finding solutions outside Vietnam (Bronée, 1993:536; Tasker, 1979:11).

The conference reached consensus on alleviating the refugee problem built around a precarious quid pro quo that involved the asylum countries agreeing to restore the principle of first asylum and provide temporary haven, as well as cease forced repatriation and lifting the naval cordon against the refugee boats, on the understanding that the resettlement countries—principally the United States, Canada, Australia and France—would resettled the refugees (Robinson, 1989:5). Twenty-five resettlement countries, led by the United States, agreed to increase resettlement places to 260,000 from the previous level of 125,000. The international community committed itself to provide adequate funds to enable the UNHCR to administer the resettlement program, which included financial support for the refugee processing centres in Indonesia and the Philippines previously proposed by ASEAN (Frost, 1980:362). In addition, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam government gave an understanding that it would endeavour to stop illegal departures “for a reasonable period of time”, in what St. Cartmail (1983:182) regarded as an admission of Vietnam’s “complicity in the expulsion of the refugees in the past”.

At the conference Secretary-General Waldheim announced that the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) had signed a memorandum of understanding with Vietnam on 30 May 1979, to permit the orderly departure of “family reunion and other humanitarian cases” from Vietnam—the Orderly Departure Program (ODP) (Robinson, 1989:6). While UNHCR considered this operation as a “humanitarian
alternative” that provided Vietnamese with a safe and legal escape option out of Vietnam instead of by boat, the U.S. government viewed the program as “an adjunct to a policy of humane deterrence to slow and, hopefully, stop the flow of boat refugees” (Kumin, 1987:2).

The Geneva Conference was generally regarded as a triumph, although some commentators at the time argued that there were serious shortcomings with the results, and that the meeting had only applied a temporary bandage rather than a long-term solution to the problem. The conference was also criticised by Nations (1979:18) for only addressing the easier half of the crisis—Vietnamese boat people—and ignoring the question of Laotian and Cambodian refugees. He also questioned whether the people Hanoi approved to leave through the ODP would be the same as those who would otherwise flee the country in boats. A number of commentators also questioned the morality of requesting Vietnam to suppress the basic human right of people to seek freedom from persecution.


There was an almost immediate decline in refugee arrivals throughout the region following the Geneva Conference (Table 3.1).40 Average monthly arrivals fell from 23,675 persons per month during the first seven months of the year, to 6,565 during the three months after the conference (August to October), and to 5,771 in the twelve month post-conference period (September 1979 to August 1980). Although these figures represented a considerable reduction from the pre-conference peak, Suhrke (1981:24–25) emphasised that they were still well above the level established before the mid-1978 Hoa exodus.

40 It was reported that refugee arrivals in Malaysia and Hong Kong had dropped dramatically the week before the conference, as an indication that Hanoi was both willing and capable of regulating the refugee flow (Nations, 1979:18).
In Suhrke’s (1981:26) opinion, there were several reasons why the refugee outflow from Vietnam in 1980 was above pre-1978 levels. She argued that economic difficulties—including high prices, food shortages, and low income—were acting as “push” factors for refugees to leave, as were non-economic factors such as military conscription to fight in Cambodia, corruption, and complaints about “societal discipline”.

A number of “pull” factors were also influencing refugees to leave Vietnam. Suhrke (1981:26) argued that the conference’s success in stopping *refoulement*,

improving camp conditions, and increasing the rate of resettlement—to a monthly average of 23,000 in early 1980—had encouraged the continuous exodus of refugees and ultimately neutralised U.N. plans to clear out the Vietnamese refugee population in South East Asian camps. St. Cartmail (1983:185) also considered Hong Kong’s open camp policy, which permitted freedom of movement and the opportunity for Vietnamese to find employment in the labour-scarce market, was a strong “pull” factor for boat people, and a reason why an increasing proportion of refugees headed to the colony. Vietnamese were no doubt encouraged to leave Vietnam by the knowledge that all refugees who arrived in asylum nations were automatically granted *prima facie* refugee status by the UNHCR and would ultimately be resettled to the West.

The pattern of refugee departures out of Vietnam changed radically in the aftermath of the 1979 Conference, as departures became more secretive and the refugee boats carried fewer passengers. Notably, the “big boat trade” of sending refugees aboard overcrowded freighters stopped. The composition of the refugee flow also changed from being three-quarters ethnic Chinese to at least seventy-five per cent Vietnamese and the remainder *Hoa* (St. Cartmail, 1983:79). Hong Kong refugee statistics indicate that eight out of every ten of the 68,748 refugees who arrived in 1979 were ethnic Chinese—26.1 per cent from the South and 54.6 per cent from the North—

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41 *Refoulement*: the pushing of refugees back out to sea or across a land border.
and less than twenty per cent Vietnamese: 14.3% southerners and 4.9 per cent northerners. The following year, over ninety-eight per cent of the 6,788 refugees who arrived were ethnic Vietnamese—82.5 per cent from southern Vietnam and 16.0 per cent from northern Vietnam—and just over one per cent were ethnic Chinese: 0.9 per cent southerners and 0.6 per cent northerners (Hong Kong Government 1995c. See Appendix 1).

Whereas the second wave of refugees (1975–1978) had been composed largely of persons associated with the former South Vietnam regime, few persons in this fourth, post-1979 wave were previously connected with the ancien regime. American data revealed that two-thirds of refugees processed in 1980 had no close relatives in the United States (although frequently a more distant relative who had left in an earlier wave), and no connections with either pre-1975 regimes in South Vietnam, or U.S. operations during the war (Suhrke, 1981:26). Suhrke (1981:26) commented that what had started out as a refugee flow was beginning to resemble a migration flow. This is supported by a report written by Jerry Tinker (1985:1), minority counsel to the U.S. Senate Immigration Subcommittee, who stated that an increasing number of Indochinese were leaving simply to find a better life elsewhere. He argued that

what started out between 1975 and 1981 as a genuine refugee flow has slowly but clearly shifted to a migratory flow now composed of some refugees, a growing number of family reunification cases, and an ever larger economic migrant component. ... Growing numbers of persons, particularly among Vietnamese leaving their country in boats ... are classic examples of economic migrants. (Tinker, 1985:1)

He concluded by stating the international community appeared content, “for a variety of reasons, into sustaining an on-going third country resettlement program, even though the character of the flow had changed” (Tinker, 1985:1).

Arrivals in 1980 declined by eighty-one per cent—from 199,945 to 69,903—following Vietnam’s prohibition on illegal departures, while simultaneously there was a

42 There were 74 persons of other ethnic backgrounds who arrived in 1979, all but one from South Vietnam (Hong Kong Government, 1995c).
seventeen per cent increase in resettlements: from 131,422 to 154,085 (Table 3.2). The regional refugee population living in camps fell from 132,354 at the end of 1979 to 53,502 in December 1980 (Hong Kong Government, 1996c).

The consensus brokered at Geneva held together for seven consecutive years, as departures outnumbered arrivals from 1980 to 1986 to produce a steady, albeit slight, decline in the total Vietnamese population living in asylum camps (Figure 3.1, Table 3.2). However, only Hong Kong resettled more persons than it received in each of the seven years (Figures 3.2), with the other, South East Asian, asylum countries experiencing fluctuating patterns of refugee arrivals and resettlements (Figures 3.3–3.8). The reduction in refugee arrivals after Geneva may be partly due to the reintroduction of “humane deterrence” policies by some asylum countries.

**Malaysia**

again resurrected the “push-off” policy, and concentrated operations on two islands—Pulau Bidong and Pulau Tengah—where conditions were particularly harsh. Hong Kong implemented a “closed camp” policy on 2 July 1982, that forced new arrivals to live in closed camps without the freedom of movement and employment opportunities previously experienced in the open centres (Chan, 1990b:95).

The numbers of Vietnamese resettled from first asylum countries declined steadily after the 1980 peak (Table 3.2, Figure 3.1), as the major resettlement countries—the United States, Australia and Canada—and lesser ones such as the United Kingdom, all reduced resettlement quotas for Vietnamese. Suhrke (1983:137) commented that there were indications that the resettlement countries were tiring in their resettlement efforts after three years of massive relief assistance and resettlement (1979–1981). Governments cited economic recessions, the need to assist refugees in other parts of the world, and concern that the refugee program had promoted assisted migration as reasons behind reduced refugee quotas. Some government officials argued that the crisis was being perpetuated by an institutionalised system that granted *prima
Figure 3.1

Vietnamese Refugee Arrivals, Resettlements, and Resident Camp Population for major First Asylum Countries, 1979–1989

Source: Hong Kong Government, 1996c
Figure 3.2
Vietnamese Refugee Arrivals, Resettlement Departures and Camp Population, Hong Kong, 1979-1989

Source: Hong Kong Government, 1996

Figure 3.3

Source: Hong Kong Government, 1996
Figure 3.4
Vietnamese Refugee Arrivals, Resettlement Departures and
Camp Population, Indonesia, 1979-1989

Source: Hong Kong Government, 1996

Figure 3.5
Vietnamese Refugee Arrivals, Resettlement Departures and
Camp Population, Thailand, 1979-1989

Source: Hong Kong Government, 1996
Figure 3.6

![Graph showing Vietnamese Refugee Arrivals, Resettlement Departures and Camp Population in the Philippines, 1979-1989.](image)

Source: Hong Kong Government, 1996

Figure 3.7

![Graph showing Vietnamese Refugee Arrivals, Resettlement Departures and Camp Population in Singapore, 1979-1989.](image)

Source: Hong Kong Government, 1996
facie refugee status to all Vietnamese, including those not fleeing persecution, and
guaranteed them resettlement to the West (Bronée, 1993:537; Cerquone, 1987:2).

Table 3.2
Refugee Arrivals And Resettlement Departures In First Asylum Countries,
1979–1989

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Arrivals</th>
<th>Resettled</th>
<th>Resettled less arrivals</th>
<th>Resettled as proportion of arrivals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>199,945</td>
<td>131,422</td>
<td>-68,523</td>
<td>65.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>69,903</td>
<td>154,085</td>
<td>+84,182</td>
<td>220.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>73,471</td>
<td>84,950</td>
<td>+11,479</td>
<td>115.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>42,698</td>
<td>44,433</td>
<td>+1,735</td>
<td>104.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>27,201</td>
<td>30,497</td>
<td>+3,296</td>
<td>112.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>24,275</td>
<td>30,956</td>
<td>+6,681</td>
<td>127.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>21,581</td>
<td>24,251</td>
<td>+2,670</td>
<td>112.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>18,813</td>
<td>22,078</td>
<td>+3,265</td>
<td>117.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>28,077</td>
<td>20,658</td>
<td>-7,419</td>
<td>73.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>44,912</td>
<td>25,042</td>
<td>-19,870</td>
<td>55.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>69,964</td>
<td>25,551</td>
<td>-44,413</td>
<td>36.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>620,840</td>
<td>593,923</td>
<td>+26,917</td>
<td>95.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Hong Kong Government, 1996c

A number of resettlement countries, including Australia and the United States,
tightened resettlement eligibility criteria, resulting in sharp increases in the number of
boat people being rejected for resettlement. This, together with declining resettlement
quotas, resulted in many refugees languishing in camps much longer. UNHCR data
revealed that almost one-third (32.4%) of the refugee population in early 1987 were
"longstayers", with sixteen per cent having been in camps for more than four years
(Table 3.3). 43 The problem was most severe in Hong Kong, where more than half

43 A longstayer is generally defined as a person who has been in a refugee camp for more than two
years.
(53.7%) the refugees had lived for four years or more. Robinson (1989:8) attributed this high percentage to the colony's geographical proximity to Vietnam, and the increasing numbers of northern Vietnamese who arrived with no ties with resettlement countries.

Table 3.3
Boat People by Length of Stay in Camps as of January 1987

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period of detention</th>
<th>Hong Kong</th>
<th>Indonesia</th>
<th>Malaysia</th>
<th>Philippines</th>
<th>Thailand</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 1 year</td>
<td>1,775</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>1,568</td>
<td>40.7</td>
<td>5,430</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-&lt;2 years</td>
<td>606</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>1,381</td>
<td>35.9</td>
<td>1,742</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-&lt;3 years</td>
<td>410</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>561</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>1,122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-&lt;4 years</td>
<td>930</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>492</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 years and over</td>
<td>4,318</td>
<td>53.7</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>258</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>8,309</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>3,849</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>9,044</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: UNHCR cited in Cerquone, 1987:13

ORDERLY DEPARTURE PROGRAM

The declining number of Vietnamese arriving throughout the region after 1979 may have been due, in part, to the establishment of the Orderly Departure Program (ODP), although it is impossible to gauge the extent, if any, that the scheme diverted persons away from the clandestine boat departures. While UNHCR viewed the ODP as a "humanitarian alternative" to escaping Vietnam secretly by boat, Vietnam viewed the ODP as a means to "rid itself of unwanted segments of its population"—primarily ethnic Chinese and Amerasian children (Tinker, 1985:5).

From moderate beginnings, the ratio of legal to illegal departures improved over the years, so that by 1987 more than 125,000 Vietnamese had left Vietnam through the
ODP and settled in more than thirty countries, while during the same period some 400,000 Vietnamese risked departure in small boats and "the uncertain future of life in refugee camps at a time of diminishing resettlement opportunities" and fled clandestinely from Vietnam despite the ODP (Figure 3.8; Kumin, 1987:244). During the first nine years, legal departures through the ODP only outnumbered boat arrivals in the region in two years: 1984 and 1985.

Without notice, Vietnam suspended the interviewing of ODP applicants on 1 January 1986, arguing that there was a backlog of 22,000 people cleared for departure by Vietnam but still being processed by the Americans. New processing did not begin again until mid-1987. The suspension of the program caused considerable concern throughout the region that refugee arrival rates would surge—and this anxiety was justified.

**Figure 3.8**

**ODP and Boat People departures from Vietnam, 1979–1987**

![Graph showing ODP and Boat People departures from Vietnam, 1979–1987](source)

Source: Kumin, 1987:271

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The major resettlement countries under the ODP have been (in alphabetical order): Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Germany, France (including New Caledonia), Greece, Hong Kong, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, the Ivory Coast, Japan, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America (Kumin, 1987:157).
1987–1988

Nineteen eighty-seven marked another milestone year in the continuing refugee saga as total arrivals increased for the first time since the 1979 Geneva Conference—from 18,813 to 28,077—with Hong Kong, Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines and Singapore each receiving substantially more refugees that year (Figures 3.2 to 3.7; Appendix 1). The alarm bells rang across the region as arrivals continued to increase in subsequent years, which together with the low resettlement rates, resulted in an upsurge in camp populations.

Thailand recorded a slight increase in arrivals (17.4%) in 1986, but these exploded the following year by a staggering 285 per cent: from 3,886 to 11,195 (Hong Kong Government, 1996c). The Thai government reacted harshly and implemented a “shut-out” policy, whereby refugee boats were prevented from landing and towed back out to sea. On 13 January 1989, The Nation—a Thai daily newspaper—(cited in Chantavanich and Rabe, 1990:70) reported that the policy had been successful, as it had reduced the number of boat refugees arriving in Thailand from 18,000 in 1987 to 4,000 in 1988. Those boat people who managed to reach Thailand safely were moved to a new camp on the Thai-Cambodian border, where they were denied access to resettlement (Robinson, 1989:6).

Refugee arrivals also escalated rapidly in other parts of the region. In Malaysia, refugee arrivals increased from 8,287 people in 1987, to 12,212 in 1988 (47.4% increase) to 16,718 in 1989 (+36.9%) despite the continuation of the “push-off” policy. In the Philippines, the 2,677 arrivals in 1987 represented a thirty per cent increase, and was followed by a forty-three per cent increase the next year when 3,826 people arrived (Hong Kong Government, 1996c; Figures 3.9 to 3.15).

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Statistics on Vietnamese refugee arrivals in Thailand according to the Hong Kong government (1996c) show a decline from 11,195 in 1987 to 7,082 in 1988.
The most dramatic increase in boat people since the 1978–1979 exodus occurred in Hong Kong during the late 1980s. The first ominous signs came in 1986, when Vietnamese arrivals increased by nearly sixty-five per cent to 3,395 persons. By the end of the year the camp populations totalled 9,537 persons—the first year in the post-Geneva period that the camp population had increased. The following year arrivals skyrocketed to 18,328 persons—a 540 per cent increase—bringing the camp population to 25,673 (Hong Kong Government, 1996c).

The increase in refugee arrivals in Hong Kong resulted in even more widespread anti-Vietnamese sentiment in the local community, with many residents being angry at the preferential treatment of the Vietnamese and the cost of supporting them, and questioning whether they were really “genuine” refugees or merely economic migrants. Government officials estimated that only about ten per cent of Vietnamese were “genuine” refugees (Diller, 1988:18). The mass media created and perpetuated “derogatory stereotypes of Vietnamese refugees as deviant, aggressive and sinister in nature” and dramatised their involvement in the trafficking and use of illicit drugs, exhortation activities, fighting in the camps between northerners and southerners, and riots between refugees and camp guards (Chan, 1990b:101–102).

It was apparent in early 1988—with this latest rise in arrivals and the increasing difficulty resettling existing refugee populations—that the state of Vietnamese refugees in the region had reached a critical stage. First asylum countries, resettlement countries and others involved in the Vietnamese refugee problem were urgently summoned by the Ford Foundation to attend a crisis meeting in Cha’am, Thailand in May 1988. It was recognised at the meeting that to ensure first asylum guarantees in the future, a comprehensive approach addressing all issues of the problem must be implemented. The first asylum governments suggested that any new approach would have to incorporate “individual refugee status determination, renewed emphasis on safe return to

46 The Hong Kong government spent HK$1,316 million on the care and maintenance of Vietnamese refugees between 1979/80 and 1988/89 (Hong Kong Government, 1995c).
Vietnam, an expanded ODP, a longstayer resettlement plan and a more predictable and flexible long term resettlement commitment from an expanded pool of countries” (Bronée, 1993:537).

The Cha’am proposal was not a new concept. Tinker (1985:2) had earlier argued the need to distinguish refugees from economic migrants, and for different strategies to cope with each flow. He reiterated the recommendations of a 1981 report to the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Immigration and Refugee Policy, that included a safe and secure scheme, under UNHCR auspices, to return non-refugees to Vietnam, and an expansion of the existing ODP, as well as maintaining existing refugee assistance. U.S. Senator Alan K. Simpson, in reviewing American immigration policy, had also advocated the introduction of a “proper” procedure to determine whether a person was a refugee (Kumin, 1987:222).

Meanwhile refugees continued to flood into the asylum countries. The upsurge in arrivals in Hong Kong during early 1988—when more than 5,000 arrived in the first five months—together with the changing nature of those arriving and the falling rate of resettlement, provoked the Hong Kong government to take drastic action and announce that:

With effect from 16 June 1988, all Vietnamese migrants arriving in Hong Kong are treated as illegal immigrants unless they are determined, by a screening procedure, to be refugees as defined by the 1951 U.N. Convention. This measure is in accordance with internationally-accepted practice of refugee status. (Hong Kong Government, 1996c)

The government advised that those persons identified by the screening procedure to be refugees would be moved to closed centres where they would join the refugees who arrived before the 16 June 1988 deadline, while those considered not to be refugees would be held in separate detention centres pending their repatriation back to Vietnam after a satisfactory agreement had been negotiated with that country.47

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47 The Hong Kong Government later agreed to progressively open up the closed centres for pre 16 June 1988 arrivals and those who arrived after the cut-off date who were determined to be refugees.
The implementation of refugee status determination procedures by the Hong Kong government from June 1988 ended the fourteen year tradition where all Vietnamese boat people who arrived in South East and East Asian asylum countries were considered to be *prima facie* refugees by the international community, and thus automatically eligible for resettlement to the West. From 16 June 1988, all asylum seekers who arrived in Hong Kong were considered to be illegal immigrants until such time that they were interviewed and determined to have a well-founded fear of persecution. According to Mushkat (1989:474), the Vietnamese arrivals were deemed guilty of being illegal immigrants before they were proven to be so.

The Hong Kong government (1995c:1) stated that their main objective in introducing the screening and appeals procedures was to identify "genuine refugees". They claimed that the majority of Vietnamese migrants who arrived during the mid-1980s did not have a well-founded fear of persecution in Vietnam and that departures were apparently motivated principally by the desire for resettlement. At this time asylum countries were also troubled by the increasing reluctance of Western countries to resettle Vietnamese boat people.

The introduction of screening procedures in Hong Kong was considered by Davis (1991:20) to be "a panic reaction to the increasing number of arrivals" and he claimed that the initiative did nothing to stem the flow of Vietnamese asylum-seekers. Mushkat (1989:475) argued that the screening policy was "another ad hoc step, designed to accommodate domestic pressures and serve as a deterrent short of abolishing Hong Kong’s status as a ‘country of first asylum’; while achieving neither”.

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48 Some individual resettlement countries, most notably Australia and the United States, did administer their own refugee status criteria in determining who they accepted for resettlement.

49 Hong Kong Government (1995c:1) claimed that more than 5,000 people arrived in the colony during the first five months of 1988 while only 1,100 people were resettled during the same period.
Both Davis (1991) and Mushkat (1989) argued that the screening procedures were not a deterrent, as refugee arrivals in Hong Kong continued at high levels (see Figure 3.10). In contrast, Bari (1992:509) claimed that the Comprehensive Plan of Action (CPA) was a success, as the annual exodus from Vietnam fell from 64,000 in 1989 to 32,000 in 1990 and 23,000 in 1991 (and to negligible levels in subsequent years). It is obvious that the screening procedures, together with the repatriation programs, did eventually slow the inflow of boat people to all asylum countries in the region. 50

Just after the Hong Kong initiative, the annual ASEAN Foreign Ministers' meeting was held in Bangkok on 4 July 1988, at which the Ministers reaffirmed the need for a new and comprehensive approach to tackle the refugee problem and called upon the U.N. Secretary-General to convene another international conference on Indochinese refugees in 1989. The ASEAN meeting was followed by a UNHCR-sponsored meeting in Bangkok on 27–28 October 1988 to discuss components of a plan that could permanently solve the refugee problem (Bronée, 1993:538). 51 On 13 December 1988, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed by the Socialist Republic of Vietnam with the UNHCR “on the principles and procedures for the voluntary repatriation” of persons to Vietnam (Nichols and White, 1993:24).

A preparatory meeting to the main UNHCR conference was convened by the Malaysian government in Kuala Lumpur between 7–9 March 1989, at which a draft

50 The decline in arrivals coincided with the increase in repatriation. Wolf (1990:163) pointed out that the number of new arrivals in Hong Kong declined dramatically after the forced repatriation of fifty-one Vietnamese boat people to Vietnam on 11 December 1989, although it was unclear whether the decline had anything to do with the forced repatriation. It could also be argued that it must have become increasingly apparent to people in Vietnam that it was difficult to obtain refugee status and resettle to the West, as the number of people who were repatriated to Vietnam increased. The decline in arrivals may also be due, in part, to the realisation that there were easier ways to migrate to the West other than spending years in inhospitable refugee camps. Many Vietnamese with ties to the West found that they could migrate to western countries through migration programs, such as the Orderly Departure or family reunion programs.

51 The meeting was entitled “Informal Consultations on Indo-Chinese Asylum Seekers in South East Asia”.

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declaration and Comprehensive Plan of Action (CPA) were approved for presentation to
the June Conference (Appendix 2). The main components of the CPA included:

A region wide procedure for refugee status determination, reassurances
for the respect of the principle of first asylum, expansion of the ODP,
outline of procedures for the return to Vietnam of persons not considered
to be refugees, an undertaking by a larger pool of resettlement countries
of a right of resettlement for those recognised as refugees. (Bronee,
1993:538)

An essential component of the agreement was the establishment of a deadline (known as
"cut-off" date) shortly after the preparatory meeting, after which individual asylum
seekers would have to undergo individual refugee status determination. This date was
included at the insistence of the resettlement countries to minimise the number of
resettlement places guaranteed between the preparatory meeting and the June
conference, and to avert a sudden surge in arrivals (Bronee, 1993:539).

THE JUNE 1989 INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON
INDOCHINESE REFUGEES

The International Conference on Indochinese Refugees (ICIR), held in Geneva
on 13–14 June 1989, represented a strategic breakthrough in the manner the
international community addressed refugee crises, as it was agreed—for the first time—
to examine the refugee problem in its totality, and not just the influx (Bronée,
1993:539). The essential component of this new approach was the Comprehensive Plan
of Action previously drawn up at the Preparatory Meeting, and which was adopted
without amendment and by consensus at the conference.

52 The Preparatory Meeting for the International Conference on Indo-Chinese Refugees.
53 The cut-off dates for the various countries were Thailand and Malaysia (14 March 1989); Indonesia
(17 March 1989); the Philippines (21 March 1989). Hong Kong had previously set the cut-off date
THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN OF ACTION

The CPA represented a fundamental shift in the treatment of Vietnamese asylum seekers, centred on individual refugee status determination. It reversed the long tradition of presumptive *prima facie* refugee status and resettlement to all Vietnamese boat people, and instead stigmatised them, according to James Hathaway (cited in Nichols and White, 1993:23), as economic migrants.

The plan comprised an unprecedented tripartite agreement between origin, first asylum and resettlement countries. The origin countries agreed to implement measures, principally at the local and provincial level, to deter clandestine departures. This would include mass media campaigns to advise the dangers involved in these departures and the difficulties asylum-seekers would encounter with status-determination mechanisms overseas. It was envisaged that persons would be discouraged from escaping Vietnam for family reunification or other “non-persecution” reasons by the introduction of the cut-off date (Bronée, 1993:540). The source countries would, instead, encourage and promote the departure of persons through expanded migration programs. Furthermore, Vietnam (and Laos) agreed to accept, and guarantee the safety of, persons returned who were judged not to be refugees under the new system (UNHCR, 1989).

Other first asylum countries in the region followed Hong Kong’s lead in 1989, when all asylum countries in the region and numerous resettlement countries signed the CPA. The refugee-receiving countries agreed to provide temporary refuge and assistance to all asylum-seekers arriving after the cut-off date, including full access to refugee screening procedures. Uniform screening procedures, guided by the Hong Kong determination procedures, were introduced throughout the region (based on the 1951 Convention\(^\text{54}\)), but which respected national laws and institutions. The resettlement

countries agreed to take all individuals who arrived in first asylum before the cut-off date, and committed themselves to resettle those who gained refugee status under the CPA. Unfortunately, the agreement to provide asylum was short-lived, with some countries quickly reverting to “humane deterrence” policies, pushing boats offshore and refusing to provide even temporary asylum (Bronée, 1993:540).

REFUGEE STATUS DETERMINATION

The cornerstone of the CPA was the introduction of consistent and region-wide procedures for refugee status determination of all Vietnamese boat people who arrived after the specified date. According to Paragraph 6(b) of the CPA, the criteria for refugee screening were

those recognised in the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, bearing in mind, to the extent appropriate, the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other relevant international documents concerning refugees, and was to be applied in a humanitarian spirit taking into account the special situation of the asylum seekers concerned and the need to respect the family unit. (Bari, 1992:493)

The status determination procedures under the Comprehensive Plan of Action have been severely criticised. Hathaway (1993:693) argued that “jurisprudence under the Comprehensive Plan of Action demonstrates an inordinate tolerance for human rights violations”. However, it cannot be disputed that the CPA was responsible for a dramatic decline in the number of Vietnamese seeking asylum in South East and East Asia after 1989.


The CPA will no doubt be remembered as the instrument responsible for halting the exodus of boat people out of Vietnam, and as a precedent for the management of similar refugee flows around the world. For example, there are similarities between the
CPA approach to Vietnamese refugees and American response to the exodus of Haitian refugees in 1992. In both cases refugee status determination was the central component that decided whether persons would be repatriated or resettled. Time will tell whether instruments such as the CPA become essential components in refugee flows in other parts of the world, especially where resettlement is seen as the principal solution.

There are some, such as McMurray (1999), who claimed that the exodus of refugees stopped as a result of changes in Vietnamese economic policy—Doi moi. However, statistics show that there was no significant decline in refugee arrivals in the region following the introduction of Doi moi.\(^{55}\) Regional arrivals in asylum countries only fell dramatically following the 1989 introduction of the CPA and the implementation of screening procedures: from 69,964 persons in 1989, to 32,063 in 1990 (Figure 3.9). It's interesting to note the dramatic decline of arrivals in all asylum countries after 1991: from 21,870 persons seeking asylum in 1991 to only 41 arrivals in 1992, 139 in 1993, 370 in 1994 and 460 in 1995 (Hong Kong Government, 1996c).

In Hong Kong, where the screening process had commenced in 1988, refugee arrivals declined from 34,108 in 1989 to 6,595 in 1990, before increasing again to 20,206 in 1991. After that, however, arrivals remained small: just twelve in 1992, 101 in 1993, 363 in 1993 and 460 to June 1995 (Figure 3.10; Hong Kong Government, 1996c).

In Malaysia, there was a ninety-two per cent decline in arrivals in 1990—from 16,718 to 1,326—and since then only one person has arrived in Malaysia, as push off polices were reintroduced. In contrast, Indonesia’s refugee burden increased after the introduction of the CPA—no doubt a result of Malaysia’s deterrence policy—with refugee arrivals more than doubling: from 6,695 in 1989 to 13,833 in 1990. Since then, however, only 1,302 persons arrived in Indonesia, with most—1,260 or 96.8%—arriving in 1991. After Thailand experienced a decline in refugee arrivals in 1989—from 7,082 in 1988 to

\(^{55}\) Regional refugee arrivals increased from 18,813 in 1986—the year Doi moi was introduced—to 28,077 in 1987, 44,912 in 1988, and 69,964 in 1989.
4,373 in 1989—numbers more than doubled in 1990 to 9,054. Only 193 refugees have arrived in Thailand since then. In the Philippines, after the number almost doubled in 1989, there was a substantial decline (83.4%) in 1990. Of the 235 Vietnamese who arrived after 1990, all but six arrived in 1991 (Hong Kong Government, 1996c).

The peak of the regional refugee population during the 1989–1996 period was in June 1991, when 115,007 persons were in asylum countries. This apparently late climax in the population was primarily due to the increasing number of arrivals in Hong Kong that year, where the population peaked in September 1991 at 64,124. In all other asylum countries there was a steady decline in the camp populations (Hong Kong, 1996c).

The decrease in camp populations after 1989 was the result of two very different migration flows. The first was the resettlement stream to primarily Western countries, which saw some 88,200 persons resettled from January 1989 to December 1995. The second migration stream involved 71,087 persons being repatriated to Vietnam during the same period. The majority of these repatriations were through the Orderly Return Program (ORP), although there were some forced repatriations from Hong Kong, the Philippines and other first asylum countries. Over two-thirds (48,057 or 67.6%) of all repatriations were from Hong Kong, followed by Thailand (8,324 or 11.7%), Indonesia (8,298 or 11.7%), Malaysia (4,866 or 6.8%), the Philippines (1,536 or 2.2%) and Singapore (6). The repatriation stream outnumbered third country resettlements in each year from 1992 (Figures 3.9 to 3.15) (Hong Kong Government, 1996c). It is clearly evident that the Comprehensive Plan of Action has been a successful tool to stem the outflow of persons from Vietnam.

**SUMMARY**

This analysis of the Vietnamese refugee exodus identifies five distinctive waves of refugees who fled Vietnam from 1975. The focus of this research is on the fifth and final wave of Vietnamese refugees who escaped following the implementation of the
Figure 3.9


Source: Hong Kong Government, 1996
Figure 3.10

Source: Hong Kong Government, 1996

Figure 3.11

Source: Hong Kong Government, 1996
Figure 3.12

Source: Hong Kong Government, 1996

Figure 3.13

Source: Hong Kong Government, 1996
Figure 3.14

Vietnamese Arrivals, Resettlements, Repatriations and Resident


![Graph showing Vietnamese Arrivals, Resettlements, Repatriations and Resident Camp Population, The Philippines, 1989–1996.](image)

Source: Hong Kong Government, 1996

Figure 3.15

Vietnamese Arrivals, Resettlements, Repatriations and Resident


![Graph showing Vietnamese Arrivals, Resettlements, Repatriations and Resident Camp Population, Singapore, 1989–1996.](image)

Source: Hong Kong Government, 1996
CPA in 1989, who are estimated to number slightly more than 75,000 persons. The introduction of the CPA meant that the experiences of persons in this wave were substantially different from those of the first four waves of refugees to leave Vietnam. To understand the experiences and processes involved in this wave requires a much more detailed level of investigation—a microlevel case study of individuals, family and community. The following chapter outlines the methodological approaches adopted in this investigation, together with a description of the research site and why it was chosen, and a demographic profile of the refugee and sample population in the camp.
THE FIELD WORK EXPERIENCE: DEVELOPMENT OF THE STUDY METHODOLOGY

Through your own efforts learn, and Heaven helps.
Let's save old books and study them with care.
To read is quite an act in these foul times.
To teach was even hard for wiser heads.
By knowledge freed, the mind flows like a stream.
With few desires, the body fears no threat.
Purge man of greed, and Heaven's truth will shine.
Must scholars think of stipends and naught else?

Phung Khac Khoan, 1979a:148–149

INTRODUCTION

The main objective of this research, as stated in Chapter 1, was to identify and describe each of the different stages in the migration of refugees who fled from Vietnam after the introduction of the Comprehensive Plan of Action in July 1989. The investigation of all stages of the refugee migration is a unique aspect of this research, as the vast majority of research previously conducted on Vietnamese refugees has concentrated on the latter stages of the refugee experience—primarily their resettlement to, and adaptation in, predominately Western countries—and has largely ignored the
earlier stages of the migration experiences. This research will illustrate that the early and middle stages play a crucial role in refugee migrations, and that an understanding of these earlier stages is essential in any research on refugee migrations.

The focal point of this research was the first asylum countries of South East and East Asia, where hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese were temporarily detained. As stated previously, the introduction of the CPA totally changed the management of Vietnamese asylum-seekers and the asylum period became an even more critical crossroads in the refugee migration. The fate of asylum-seekers depended on whether they obtained refugee status or not, with only those asylum-seekers who succeeded in obtaining refugee status permitted to apply for resettlement to third countries. Although there were appeal processes available for those rejected for refugee status, once these avenues were exhausted the resettlement path was closed and the rejected asylum-seekers were required to return to Vietnam.\(^1\) The first asylum country was considered such an important crossroad in Vietnamese refugee migration that it was essential that at least part of the research was focussed at this point, so that past and present stages of refugee experiences could be freely investigated.

**SELECTION OF A RESEARCH SITE**

A major task in planning this research was to identify a field work location where the proposed study could be undertaken. There was a lack of detailed, contemporary information on the situation in the refugee camps throughout South East and East Asia. Despite the extensive amount of literature written on Vietnamese refugees over the years, only a relatively small amount of this research has been directed at the refugee camps themselves. Chan (1990a:4) went so far as to say that “social

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\(^1\) Although the rejected asylum-seekers were required to return to Vietnam, in the most part, the timing of the repatriation was with the individual. Many elected to stay in the camps for lengthy periods rather than return.
science literature (descriptive or otherwise) on refugee camp life was (and continues today to be) virtually non-existent”. He attributed this paucity of information to the fact that refugee camps were considered, until recently, to be temporary measures, and that “the temporariness and transitoriness of camps and camp life render them unattractive in the eyes of the practitioners of ‘normal science’”. He added that the issue of social scientists conducting field work on refugee camp life had become an extremely sensitive subject. Unfortunately, governments the world over are notoriously reluctant to permit research on refugee populations within their own borders, and those in East and South East Asia are no exception. Bousquet (1987:41) attributed this reluctance by governments to allow social scientists or journalists to enter camps—and therefore the scarcity of literature written on them—to the fact that they do not want to be criticised for the manner in which the camps are operated.2

There has also been a marked decline in the amount of research conducted on Vietnamese refugees in recent years compared with that undertaken during the first decade of the exodus. This problem is compounded by the fact that information on refugee situations becomes dated very quickly, so that by the time an article or book is published conditions in the camps may have changed significantly. This was the situation encountered when this project was proposed in 1993.

The implementation of the CPA changed the asylum experience from a brief transitory sojourn, generally in one refugee camp, into two different, traumatic periods of incarceration: an asylum period during which the Vietnamese sought refugee status and a transit period in which they sought resettlement. These changes meant that much of the existing literature had become outdated, as it discussed a refugee experience that occurred under a previous, obsolete framework. Research on Vietnamese refugees in the detention and refugee camps during the post-CPA period is very scant, with Davis’

2 However, at times in the early 1980s, some governments encouraged journalists to visit camps such as Pulau Bidong in Malaysia and Aranyaprathet in Thailand, in order to raise Western public consciousness about the refugees. Governments hoped that this would increase pressure on Western governments to resettle more refugees.
(1991) research on the Hong Kong camps being the most significant publication to date. To put this scarcity of research into perspective, the Regional Resettlement Transit Center (RRTC), where the majority of this research was conducted, was not established until 1990 and has not been discussed in any literature.

An extensive literature review provided some insight of possible research locations. Publications by Bousquet (1987), Hitchcox (1990b), Knudsen (1983) and Tollefson (1989) were particularly useful in identifying countries where the proposed research could be undertaken and the type and amount of access to the refugee population that could be expected. Equally important, some of these authors also discussed the problems of researchers gaining entry into refugee camps. For example, Hitchcox (1990b) was particularly informative in describing the difficulties of obtaining permission to enter the camps during her field work in South East and East Asian camps during 1988. She stated that it was virtually impossible to conduct research in the Hong Kong camps and that the extremely strict policy in Thailand meant it was very difficult to obtain the necessary permission for research. She even found that problems occurred after permission had been granted, citing the example when the Thai government revoked her entry permit into one of the camps shortly before she was due to commence her research (Hitchcox, 1990b:13). Former refugee camp workers confirmed this information, and as a consequence, Thailand and Hong Kong were both dismissed as possible research locations.

Indonesia and Malaysia both have notoriously bad reputations for refusing research visas, or delaying them for a very long time. Personal communications with expatriate staff who had previously worked in camps in the region stressed the difficulties in gaining access to refugee camps in both countries. Therefore, both countries were given low priorities as possible field work locations due to the length of time it would have taken to obtain an appropriate research visa, if one was issued at all.

It was also important to consider what access to the refugee population authorities would permit. Coughlan (Personal communication, 1996) stated that the
situation varied from camp to camp over time. For example, in 1979 he was permitted to spend a week on Pulau Bidong, but at Pulau Tengah (near Mersing) he was required to return to the mainland every afternoon. Hitchcox (1990b) found that even when she obtained permission to research the Vietnamese boat people in Hong Kong and Thailand, access was severely restricted. It was only in the Philippines that she was allowed to live with the refugees all day—sharing their accommodation and food—an experience she said significantly increased her ability to understand camp life from a refugee’s perspective (Hitchcox, 1990b:14). In all other countries visited, she was strictly forbidden to remain inside the camp overnight, which was an important constraint on the amount and kind of material she collected.

It is unfortunate that the first asylum governments have not permitted research to be conducted in asylum camp environments. The opportunity to conduct much needed research on this little-known population has now passed. The refugee determination process is a vital component in the Vietnamese refugee experience and asylum-seekers who were rejected for refugee status are an important sub-group of the Vietnamese refugee population. If governments want to encourage repatriation, then they need to understand why some people decide to return while others choose to remain in first asylum camps. This can only be achieved through relevant research.

The descriptions of refugee camps in the region presented by Bousquet (1987), Chan and Loveridge (1987), Davis (1991), Hitchcox (1990b), Knudsen (1983, 1990) and Tollefson (1989) suggested that the Philippines was the most logical location for the proposed research, as it appeared easier to obtain permission to enter the camps and there was apparently almost unlimited access to the refugee population. Another factor in favour of the Philippines was that there were only three main camps in the country—the Philippines First Asylum Camp (PFAC)\(^3\), the Philippines Refugee Processing Center

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\(^3\) The PFAC, situated on the island of Palawan—forty-five minutes flying time south-west of Manila—was a first asylum camp that housed Vietnamese asylum seekers until they obtained refugee status, or after their application for refugee status was declined.
(PRPC)\(^4\) and the Regional Resettlement Transit Center (RRTC)\(^5\)—each with distinctive Vietnamese “refugee” populations.\(^6\)

It was envisaged that the different camps would enable research to be conducted on different stages of the refugee experience in different environments. Field enquiries at PFAC could be directed at investigating the asylum phase of the migration, including the determination of refugee status procedures. It would also enable research to be conducted with those persons who were rejected for refugee status, including some people who had volunteered for repatriation to Vietnam. Research at the RRTC site would concentrate on those persons who had obtained refugee status, and investigate their applications for resettlement to Western countries.

Some problems were experienced obtaining permission from the Philippines Department of Foreign Affairs to conduct research at the Palawan camp.\(^7\) Officials from the Office of South East Asian Affairs recommended contacting the Deputy Representative of UNHCR in Manila, who was responsible for issuing permission to enter the Palawan camp. However, unbeknown at the time, the Deputy Representative had been called to Palawan because of an emergency at the PFAC camp and his return was uncertain.\(^8\) In the meantime, the research proposal was discussed with officials at

\(^4\) The PRPC complex was located on the Bataan Peninsula, approximately 190 kilometres from Manila. The PRPC was a large establishment that housed Vietnamese who arrived directly from Vietnam through the Orderly Departure Program. It previously accommodated Vietnamese, Laotians and Cambodians who were granted refugee status prior to the introduction of the CPA in 1989, and who underwent orientation programs prior to preceding to the United States.

\(^5\) The RRTC was a smaller complex that adjoined the PRPC. It housed only Vietnamese who had obtained refugee status under the CPA, and who had been transferred from either PFAC or one of the detention centres in Hong Kong.

\(^6\) There was also the Philippine Refugee Transit Center in Manila which provided temporary, usually overnight, accommodation for incoming and outgoing refugees, as well as referral cases (medical and administrative) from PFAC, Palawan (Philippines Refugee Processing Center, 1994a:9).

\(^7\) An application for permission was submitted to the Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs—the office responsible for the administration of the refugee camps through the Task Force on International Refugee Assistance and Administration (TFIRAA)—in mid-1993. The application was personally followed-up in Manila at the beginning of January 1994, but a further delay was experienced.

\(^8\) It was later discovered that a demonstration was held in PFAC by some Vietnamese asylum seekers just before Christmas 1993 concerning the death of a Vietnamese man, which the boat people attributed to the reduction of health facilities in the camp.
the Philippines Refugee Transit Center (PRTC) in Manila, who suggested it would be more beneficial to go to the PRPC, as refugee status determination was virtually completed at PFAC, with only rejected asylum seekers remaining in the camp.

In view of the difficulty contacting the UNHCR Deputy Representative, and with little prospect of obtaining permission to go to Palawan in the immediate future, it was decided to take the earlier advice and visit the PRPC/RRTC complex first, and hopefully relocate to the PFAC later in the year. An application to conduct research at the PRPC was forwarded to the camp administration office in Manila, and a reply granting approval was received later that same day. The research commenced at the Philippines Refugee Processing Center on 17 January 1994.

THE PHILIPPINES REFUGEE PROCESSING CENTER (PRPC)

The Philippines Refugee Processing Center was established following the United Nations Conference on Indochinese Refugees held in Geneva in July 1979 to discuss the growing problems of Indochinese refugees, and in particular, Vietnamese boat people. At the conference the Philippines government, through Foreign Minister Carlos Romulo, offered to establish a transit camp to accommodate Indochinese refugees from various first asylum nations throughout South East Asia (Philippines Refugee Processing Center, 1994a:2).

The following month the Task Force on International Refugee Assistance and Administration (TFIRAA) was established to commence planning for the proposed new

\[\text{Requests were made later in the year, in Manila and Puerto Princesa, to conduct research at PFAC but were again refused. An application was made to the PRPC Administrator, a member of the TFIRAA committee, at the suggestion of the UNHCR Field Officer at PRPC and were followed by a number of letters. However, all correspondence remained unanswered. The Administrator's office suggested applying to TFIRAA at the Department of Foreign Affairs. A meeting was subsequently held with an officer of the Office of South East Asian Affairs to discuss the matter. The officer advised that the Task Force was no longer granting permission for anyone to visit PFAC, as the authorities were concerned that the presence of a "Westerner" in the camp could deter asylum seekers from applying to the voluntary repatriation scheme. The official admitted that there was no evidence to support this claim, but they did not want to chance any disruption to the program.}\]
camp (Philippines Refugee Processing Center, 1994a:2). On 12 November 1979, the Philippine government formally agreed to construct and operate a Refugee Processing Center at Morong, Bataan under the funding of the UNHCR. The agreement stipulated that the PRPC would accommodate only pre-processed, pre-selected Indochinese refugees who had already been accepted by their countries of final destination. The first refugees arrived at the camp from Pulau Bidong, Malaysia on 21 January 1980 and the camp closed in late December 1994 (Philippines Refugee Processing Center, 1994a:3).

The camp was located on the main island of Luzon, approximately 190 kilometres—or over three hours drive—from Manila (Figure 4.1). Located about eight kilometres inland from the small fishing village of Morong, the camp was situated atop a ridge on the western side of the Batalan River, and extended over more than 300 hectares. It is unfortunately ironic that an Aeta community had to be displaced from their land in order for the refugee camp to be established. The Aetas were driven from the area by the military into the Bataan National Park Reservation behind the camp, their huts were burnt and their land bulldozed. They stayed there illegally until 1987, when President Aquino proclaimed 165 hectares of the Bataan National Park as the Kanawan Negritos Reservation Area.

As the name implies, the Philippines Refugee Processing Center was a processing camp for refugees who had obtained asylum in other countries throughout the region—from India to Japan—and were en route to other, predominately Western, nations. Just over half (54.1% or 183,697) of the 339,209 persons processed had arrived at the camp from first asylum camps in Thailand, another 13.8 per cent (46,762 persons) from Malaysia and 4.9 per cent (16,659 persons) from Hong Kong. Almost five per cent (4.7% or 16,098 persons) had transferred from PFAC at Palawan in the Philippines.

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11 The Aetas are one of the local aboriginal tribes of the Philippines in the Negrito group. They are distinguishable from all other Filipinos by their physical characteristics, being darker and shorter (rarely taller than 1.5 metres), with short, fuzzy hair.
Figure 4.1

Location of Asylum and Refugee Camps in the Philippines
The camp also acted as a processing centre for some 65,708 persons (or 20.4%) who arrived directly from Vietnam through the Orderly Departure Program (ODP). The vast majority of the 343,419 persons who had resettled from the camp had gone to the United States (335,865 persons or 97.8%), with Germany (3,315 or 0.9%) and Norway (3,119 or 0.9%) being the only other resettlement countries of any significance (Philippines Refugee Processing Center, 1994b).

The PRPC was constructed in two stages, with Phase I initially built to accommodate 10,000 refugees, followed by Phase II in October 1980, which accommodated an additional 7,000 people. The camp was divided into ten areas known as neighbourhoods, six in Phase I and four in Phase II (Figure 4.2). In the early days of the camp, when Vietnamese, Cambodians and Laotians were forced to share accommodation, there was frequently ethnic tension and conflicts. However, as the camp became better established the administration attempted to reduce the tension by allocating the different nationalities into separate neighbourhoods, although no area was reserved for any one particular birthplace group. Knudsen (1983:5) reported that one neighbourhood was occupied by Laotian refugees, four areas by Cambodians and five areas by Vietnamese. Two of the “Vietnamese” neighbourhoods comprised mainly refugees from northern Vietnam, who were often regarded with scepticism as many were considered communist spies or sympathisers. The Cambodians and Laotians had long since departed the PRPC by 1994, although evidence of their sojourn in the camp—in the form of statues and other monuments—was still visible in some neighbourhoods. The six neighbourhoods in Phase I, and two in Phase II had closed by the time this research was undertaken, and only Neighbourhoods 7 and 10 were still operational. These two areas were closed in mid-1994 and the refugees moved to the adjoining Regional Resettlement Transit Center, which is described below. The PRPC was like a small city. The neat and methodical layout of the buildings gave the impression of a military camp. The core of the camp was 285 residential blocks,
Figure 4.2
Map of Philippines Refugee Processing Center

Source: Geiger, 1994
each containing ten family units known as billets, that housed the refugees. Dispersed throughout the camp were 204 community facilities, including school classrooms, vocational training centres, assembly halls, a hospital, and various churches, chapels and temples. In addition, there were thirty-two auxiliary facilities, such as a food warehouse, a post office, fire station, food distribution centre, auxiliary power plant, plus 134 administrative structures, including the main administration building, agency buildings, processing centres and staff houses and dormitories.

Security in the camp was maintained by a private security firm, with armed guards patrolling the camp twenty-four hours a day. A gaol—referred to as the “monkey-house”—confined refugees who breached camp regulations. The PRPC operations included a fleet of buses and other vehicles that were used to transport refugees and staff, and each of the voluntary agencies had various motor vehicles.\textsuperscript{13} Motorcycles equipped with sidecars acted as taxis within the camp, and also to Morong. A large undercover market served both refugees and staff, selling a wide variety of fresh meat, fish and vegetables together with other foodstuffs. The camp's infrastructure cost more than US$21 million (Philippines Refugee Processing Center, 1994a:5).

More than 160,000 refugees received formal skills training at the PRPC from staff employed by one of the international voluntary organizations that operated in the camp. There were ten levels of second language training and cultural orientation, seventeen employment skills training courses, nine socio-cultural/talent development courses and eight special training programs (Philippines Refugee Processing Center, 1994a:8).

A total of 339,209 Indochinese refugees had arrived and been processed at the camp by the end of September 1994. More than two-thirds of this population were

\textsuperscript{13} The major agencies working in the camp were the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC), International Organization for Migration (IOM), World Relief Corporation (WRC), Community and Family Services International (CFSI), Philippine Baptist Refugee Ministries (PBRM), Center for Assistance to Displaced Persons (CADP), and Joint Voluntary Agencies (JVA).
Vietnamese (229,620 or 67.7%), with 70,241 (20.7%) Cambodians, and 39,348 (11.6%) Laotians (Table 4.1).^{14}

### Table 4.1

**Cumulative Population of the Philippines Refugee Processing Center, 1980–1994**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Processed (Arrivals)</th>
<th>Births</th>
<th>Deaths</th>
<th>Deprocessed (Departures)</th>
<th>Total Refugee Population Remaining in Camp</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vietnamese</td>
<td>229,620</td>
<td>2,649</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>231,655</td>
<td>441</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambodian</td>
<td>70,241</td>
<td>1,783</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>71,943</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laotian</td>
<td>39,348</td>
<td>518</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>39,821</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>339,209</strong></td>
<td><strong>4,950</strong></td>
<td><strong>299</strong></td>
<td><strong>343,419</strong></td>
<td><strong>441</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*a* Processed 21-01-80 to 30-10-93  
*b* Births 14-02-80 to 19-09-94  
*c* Deaths 01-02-80 to 01-12-93  
*d* Deprocessed 01-02-80 to 26-09-94

Source: Philippines Refugee Processing Center, 1994b

The population of the PRPC constantly changed, with a continuous flow of refugees in and out of the camp. Three periods in the fifteen year history of the PRPC are notable for their high refugee population, when the camp reached the 17,000 person capacity (Figure 4.3). First, beginning in November 1980—the first year of operation—when the monthly population averaged 17,128 persons and fluctuated at very high numbers for the next sixteen months. After a decline in 1982, the camp population began increasing again in late 1983, reaching capacity in May 1984 (17,107), and maintaining high levels

An interesting demographic statistic evident in Table 4.1 is the high crude birth rate among Cambodian refugees (25.4 births per 1,000 population) in comparison to Laotians (13.2) and Vietnamese (11.5). Unfortunately, apart from Holck and Cates' (1982) study on the fertility of Khmer refugees in two refugee camps in Thailand, relatively little research has been conducted on fertility rates of Indochinese refugees in the camp environments. Once again, more refugee research has been undertaken in resettlement countries than in first asylum countries. For example, Gordon (1982, 1985, 1987), Hopkins and Clarke (1983), Rumbaut and Weeks (1985), and Weeks, Rumbaut, Brindis, Korenbrot and Minkler (1989) have all undertaken research on Indochinese refugee fertility in the United States, while Coughlan (1990c) undertook a study of the fertility and living arrangements of the Indochinese in Australia.
until mid-1986. The third peak began in late 1988, reaching the all-time peak in August 1990 (17,997) and fluctuating around this level until early 1991, before starting a steady and terminal decline.

Figure 4.3

Source: Philippines Refugee Processing Center, 1994b

The PRPC population had fallen to 1,796 persons at the commencement of field work in January 1994, and by the time research was completed in October 1994 it had declined to 441 persons. A considerable number of those remaining in the camp had left Vietnam through the ODP, but their resettlement to the United States had been delayed because of medical reasons or terminated due to criminal offences.\(^{15}\)

\[^{15}\] Many of the ODP persons who had their migration terminated had committed offences within the camp, such as assault, drug abuse, etc. or were found to have forged their documents.
THE REGIONAL RESETTLEMENT TRANSIT CENTER (RRTC)

The Regional Resettlement Transit Center (RRTC) was constructed adjacent to the existing PRPC site. It was opened in July 1990 as part of a British-funded plan to relieve congestion in the first asylum camps in Hong Kong. The RRTC was a separate physical entity, and the populations were recorded separately. However, both camps were administered by the Task Force on International Refugee Assistance and Administration (TFIRAA), and the RRTC was under the management of the PRPC. Refugees at the RRTC used some PRPC facilities, as well as those at the RRTC.

The principal difference between the two camps was the composition of the camp populations. The PRPC mainly comprised ODP persons migrating to the United States, together with a few cases of pre-CPA (1989) refugees. The ODP refugees consisted of two sub-groups: members of current groups (or cycles) en route to the United States, and those whose resettlement had been placed on hold due to medical or legal reasons. RRTC was comprised almost entirely of Vietnamese boat people who arrived in Hong Kong or the Philippines after the introduction of the CPA in June 1989. Some 10,730 Vietnamese boat people had been transferred to the RRTC between July 1990 and August 1994, with half arriving from Hong Kong and slightly fewer (48.7%) from PFAC at Palawan, and a small number of ex-China cases (Figure 4.4). Refugees at RRTC were not required to undergo the stringent education and cultural orientation programs like the ODP refugees in PRPC. A more detailed description of the facilities at RRTC is provided in Chapter 7.

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16 The populations of both camps were recorded separately, and were shown on blackboards at the PRPC administration centre. Any transfers between camps, as occasionally occurred, were noted as transfers to the respective camp.
17 The PRPC had previously accepted refugees from other first asylum countries. However, refugees in the ODP to the United States, and to a lesser degree Norway, became the dominant refugees.
18 Each new ODP group that arrived at PRPC was numbered, and referred to as a cycle e.g. Cycle 123, or Cycle 345.
19 Ex-China cases are refugees who fled Vietnam and settled in China, but later fled that country and sought asylum elsewhere.
The RRTC camp population peaked at 3,570 persons in August 1992, and then declined steadily (Figure 4.5). At the beginning of field work there were 1,657
Vietnamese refugees awaiting resettlement, but by the end of September 1994 the number had fallen to 1,307 persons. The RRTC closed at the end of December 1994, with the remaining refugees transferred to the Philippine Refugee Transit Center (PRTC) in Manila.

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The research methodology chosen for this study was the ethnosurvey, as it had proven successful in earlier research conducted on Afghan refugees (Foley, 1991). The ethnosurvey, as defined by sociologist Douglas Massey (1987), is a multisite and multimethod approach that combines in a single study the most salient features of both quantitative and qualitative strategies. Overall, it produces a “body of data with greater reliability and more internal validity than is possible to achieve using either method alone” (Massey, 1987:1504). The five features of this research are multimethod data collection, representative multisite sampling, multilevel data compilation, life history collection and parallel sampling.

Qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection can be incorporated in one of four ways. The first is a sequential design, where qualitative techniques precede survey instruments. In the second, parallel design, both methods occur concurrently, but separately. The fused approach, the third possibility, combines the most appropriate aspects of both in one design. An interactive approach, the fourth alternative, and the one adopted for this research, uses parts of all three previous designs during all phases of research design, data collection, and analysis (Massey, 1987:1505). Specifically, in this study, a questionnaire was developed, which was both preceded and followed by ethnographic techniques, including participant observation, interviews and archival retrieval. Experience gained from earlier qualitative work was incorporated in the design of a semi-structured interview schedule.
The ethnosurvey's second element is representative, multisite sampling. Five research sites were selected to conduct the ethnosurvey: the Regional Resettlement Transit Center at Bataan, the Philippine First Asylum Camp at Palawan and the Australian cities of Melbourne, Sydney and Adelaide. Unfortunately, Filipino officials denied access to the Philippine First Asylum Camp at Palawan, so that no formal research was conducted in that Camp. However, meetings with four asylum-seekers from the Palawan camp informally discussed their predicament in the camp.

Compilation of multilevel data, embracing the individual, the household and the community, is the third feature outlined by Massey (1987:1507). Although the individual was the focus of this study, information on the family and the camp community was obtained through semi-structured interviews, participant observation and secondary data sources. Valuable insights into the Vietnamese community in Australia were obtained from community and religious leaders.

The fourth component of the ethnosurvey requires the compilation of life histories. The life history, as defined by Agar (1980:223), "is a personalised account of an individual's life experiences and the thoughts and events that surround them, presented in a social situation consisting of an informant and an ethnographer". The research focused on the individual's experiences as a refugee rather than a total life history, although it did seek details of the person's life in Vietnam prior to departure. Life histories were constructed around four of the five stages of the refugee experience, and details of the refugee at these different times and in different environments was sought.20

In his discussion of the ethnosurvey, Massey (1987:1510) proposed that whenever a social process, such as international migration, "transcends two distinct geographic areas ... contemporaneous samples of migrants in both sending and receiving societies" should be obtained. This implies that a sample of migrants should

20 The life history could not seek information about the fifth stage—resettlement—as respondents had not reached this stage.
be taken in Vietnam. However, it would be impossible to question people in Vietnam about their intentions of leaving the country. Therefore, for this study, it was proposed that refugees in the camps were from the “sending society”, and refugees resettled to Australia would be regarded as the “receiving society”.

Research at the PRPC/RRTC began in early January 1994, and the first weeks were spent in familiarisation with the new environment and its inhabitants—Vietnamese, Filipino and expatriate—with special attention paid to participant observation of camp life. Importantly, this research tool was not restricted to this early stage, but continued throughout field work.

In early February 1994, the camps’ refugee registration records were accessed. These records consisted of a file card system, recording the name, date of birth, sex, education, English ability and occupation of the Principal Refugee Applicant (PRA), together with the number of persons in that case number, and occasionally some details of the other persons in the case. All family members were generally kept under the same case number. The information obtained from these cards was entered onto computer over a four week period in February, using the EPI-INFO statistical package. The file contained the details of some 3,453 persons who were in the PRPC (1,796) and the RRTC (1,657) camps at that time. Unfortunately, the data was irretrievably lost due to a computer malfunction.

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21 It would be virtually impossible to seek information from intending refugees because it was an illegal act, and respondents would not volunteer easily. Secondly, the number of boat people leaving Vietnam had declined to a small number at this stage, which would have further diminished the possibility of interviewing impending refugees. (See Figures 3.9 to 3.15 for number of arrivals in first asylum countries between 1989–1996).

22 In some instances, a case was split into two, generally at the request of the family members. This was generally done if there was a problem with one family member.

23 The disk drive on the computer malfunctioned whilst conducting some analysis of the data and damaged the floppy disks on which the data had been written. All attempts to retrieve this information in the field, and later in Australia, proved futile, and the data was irretrievably lost. The data could not be reentered because the majority of cards had been taken out of the file system, and it would have been impossible to reconstruct the original database.
Introductory research revealed a number of sub-groups in the refugee population at Bataan as was mentioned above. The diversity of the refugee population at Bataan meant it was necessary to further define the target population. A brief survey of the ODP Vietnamese was conducted to elicit more information about this sub-population. It was considered beneficial to obtain some further insight into this group of refugees in order to have a better understanding of the camp and its occupants, and further define the study.

Fifty-four interviews were conducted with Vietnamese during March. Almost two-thirds (63% or 34) of interviews were conducted with persons in current ODP cycles who were migrating to the United States in the ensuing months, with the remainder conducted with "longstayers". The interviews consisted of a series of open-ended questions about the program and the refugee, asked in Vietnamese through a translator. The length of interviews varied greatly, from about thirty minutes to more than ninety minutes.

The data collected during this survey reinforced other information on the ODP and it was decided not to include these refugees in the current study, as they fell outside the parameters previously set for this research. Kumin (1987:140–144) has argued that the Orderly Departure Program poses "a perplexing problem" in that it lies halfway between a migration stream and a refugee exodus. She claimed that the normal sequence in refugee migrations—where flight is followed by efforts to find refuge—has been reversed in the ODP situation, where the search for asylum precedes departure (Kumin, 1987:138). There is also a technical doubt whether the ODP persons are refugees in international law. According to the UNHCR, an applicant for refugee status must be outside the country of their nationality, and there are no exceptions to this rule (UNHCR, 1979:Paragraph 88). Furthermore, persons in the ODP were not required to demonstrate a well founded fear of persecution in Vietnam. The survey revealed that ODP respondents were not as well versed in UNHCR regulations and criteria for refugee status as the Vietnamese boat people, as they seldom mentioned persecution in
Vietnam as a reason for leaving. This is not to say that they did not suffer from persecution, which many did, but merely that they were not required to prove such abuse. As a result of the field enquiries into the ODP it was decided that the focus of the research would be confined to Vietnamese boat people who had left Vietnam since the introduction of the Comprehensive Plan of Action in 1989.

The ODP survey was an effective tool to obtain information on the program and the persons in it. It also proved beneficial in raising a number of issues concerning refugee life at the Bataan complex that otherwise may not have arisen, and were subsequently included in the RRTC survey. As such, it proved to be a very valuable precursor to the main survey.

The RRTC population at the beginning of 1994 (1,657 persons) was too large to attempt a complete field census, so it was necessary to implement a sampling procedure to reduce the target population to a workable number. After examining a number of sampling alternatives it was decided to modify the research to a longitudinal study of Vietnamese refugees resettling to Australia, which would involve interviewing a number of refugees on two occasions: once in the RRTC and again in Australia in early 1995. Therefore the target population was confined to those refugees who had been provisionally accepted for resettlement to Australia by the then Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs (DIEA) subject to obtaining health clearance.

A sampling frame consisting of those refugees provisionally accepted by the DIEA for resettlement to Australia—as of 14 April 1994—was obtained from the UNHCR’s Resettlement Officer. The list contained the case number (refugee registration number), names of all persons in that case, the relation of all persons in the

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24 The term “ODP refugees” is mainly used by the United States of America, which is partly related to their welfare and political status once in the USA. For Australia and most other countries, ODP people are migrants, generally classified as family reunion migrants.

25 The Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs (DIEA) was subsequently renamed the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA). However, this research will retain the name of the Department at the time the research was conducted.
case to the Principal Refugee Applicant (PRA), the date of birth of all persons, the date of acceptance by the Australian delegation, and the billet number (address) of 433 persons who had been accepted in 190 cases. Refugees from Palawan were differentiated from those transferred from Hong Kong by different prefixes to their registration numbers.26 There were 149 persons from Palawan (RS)—87 (20.1% overall) males and 62 (14.3%) females—and 284 refugees from Hong Kong (TC)—143 (33.0%) males and 141 (32.6%) females—in the sampling frame.

A detailed questionnaire that sought information on the different stages in the refugee experience was compiled. It included questions on a person’s background in Vietnam, their reasons for, and means of, escaping the country, their arrival in an asylum country and the subsequent screening process, details of the first asylum and transit camps, and expectations about resettlement to Australia (Appendix 5). The questionnaire was subsequently translated into Vietnamese, together with a letter of introduction detailing the research. These documents were checked by translating them back into English using different translators. The translation process ended up taking over two weeks to complete, considerably longer than originally anticipated.

After all the necessary documents had been translated, a pilot study was conducted in the last week of April 1994. As a result of the pilot, some minor alterations were made to two questions in the translated questionnaire. The pilot survey also identified a procedural problem of using the computer-generated sampling frame list. When this form was produced by the field assistant it was mistaken by some refugees as a list of refugees departing for Australia and caused considerable excitement and confusion among the small group of refugees, despite attempts to advise them that it was not a departure list. To avoid a repetition of this incident, the name and case number of each PRA was copied from the sampling frame into a small notebook according to their address (billet number) in the camp. This provided a list of all billets.

26 Refugees from PFAC at Palawan had RS prefixes (e.g. RS0000000), while those from Hong Kong were given numbers starting with TC (e.g. TC0000000).
in numerical order, that housed a person who was resettling to Australia. Not only did this procedure ensure that the UNHCR-supplied sampling frame was not mistaken as a departure list, it enabled the research to easily concentrate in particular areas (e.g. northern section of Neighbourhood 12) rather than moving all over the camp in search of a particular refugee, or scanning through a dozen pages in search of a name or address. The selection of refugees according to their address (billet), and not their registration number, also ensured the random mixture of Hong Kong and Palawan refugees. A new field assistant also had to be recruited after the pilot survey, which was more difficult than anticipated.27

There was an almost continuous, although somewhat irregular, movement of refugees in and out of the camp, as refugees departed almost weekly and new refugees arrived slightly less frequently. When interviews began in the second week of May, it was discovered that some of the people being sought for interviews had already departed for Australia. It is calculated that twenty-eight PRAs and their families listed on the sampling frame left the camp before the survey actually started, and that an additional thirty-seven cases departed after the survey commenced, but before they could be interviewed. Four cases were deleted from the sampling frame because they had been rejected for resettlement on health grounds after the compilation of the list. Nine persons declined to be interviewed and one other person was not interviewed because he was imprisoned at Balanga gaol. There were three cases that could not be located in the camp because their address or other details were incorrect. A total of 108 interviews were conducted with Principal Refugee Applicants.

27 The field assistant who conducted the pilot survey wanted to spend time with his wife and new-born son and not work on the survey. The recruitment of a new field assistant was difficult because there were only a relatively small number of refugees in the camp who had a sufficiently high standard of English to work as a field assistant, and who were willing to undertake the task. Most of the better English speakers already worked for voluntary agencies or camp offices, and preferred to continue with that work. In addition, some other “suitably-qualified” persons were preparing to resettle overseas. However, a young and enthusiastic Vietnamese male was recruited for the study, and was subsequently trained for the interview procedures. He worked in this role until July, when he left the camp. Fortunately there was some advance warning of his departure, which allowed another young Vietnamese man to be recruited and trained, so that the interviews continued uninterrupted.
Refugees were usually selected for interviews randomly from the notebook according to their camp address. However, some refugees were specifically targeted for interviews when their names were displayed on the departure lists a week or two before their impending departure. The advanced warning allowed interviews to target those refugees who were due to leave the camp for Australia in the following days. When the list of persons and destinations was extensive, priority was given to interviewing those refugees resettling to cities that could be easily accessed in 1995: Adelaide, Canberra, Melbourne and Sydney. This procedure enabled most PRAs listed for departure to be interviewed before they resettled, although a small number of persons departed before they could be interviewed.

Departure lists were not posted after the end of July, when Australian Cultural Orientation teachers stopped working in the camp. Consequently, the notice of impending departures was reduced to less than a week. The field assistant generally advised the researcher that a new departure list had arrived, and details were obtained from the RRTC office. The final week for refugees in the camp was a particularly busy time, especially the last couple of days when they had to obtain inoculations at the IOM clinic, return household goods to the PRPC/RRTC warehouse, and obtain clearances from the RRTC office. Besides the formal requirements there were also farewell parties that the refugees organised to say goodbye to their friends. The lack of advance warning made it far more difficult to interview all the PRAs on the departure lists before they left the camp.

28 During the first half of the year the names of persons departing for Australia were posted on a notice board in the camp between one and two weeks before their departure. The lists, generally referred to as “departure lists”, were brought to camp from the Australian Embassy in Manila by Australian Cultural Orientation teachers, who were generally spouses of staff in the Australian Embassy. The departure lists contained the case number and name of the PRA, their case size, and their intended destination (using the international three letter airport code, e.g. SYD for Sydney, MEL for Melbourne, ASP for Alice Springs).

29 The lists were forwarded by International Organization for Migration (IOM) courier. Not only did this take longer, but officials did not deem it necessary to post a copy of the lists on the notice board. Refugees were advised of their departure individually (which had occurred previously as well).
A conscious decision was made to work with a single translator, rather than employ a team of assistants, in order to maintain control of the questioning. Because the questionnaire was a semi-structured instrument with open-ended questions, it was extremely important to be able to direct the flow of the questions. This method also allowed respondents to supply additional information that was not sought in the questionnaire, and provided a forum for the respondents to ask questions about Australia, Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs procedures, and other matters relating to their resettlement. The difficulty of recruiting suitable assistants was a secondary factor in not adopting a team approach.

A consistent interview procedure was maintained throughout the survey. First, a potential respondent was located, and the field assistant introduced the researcher and outlined the research project, and asked whether the person was willing to be interviewed. The respondents were told that their participation in the study was completely voluntary, and that the interview would have no influence on their resettlement to Australia. It was emphasised that the research was independent of any agency or government, and that all responses were strictly confidential and that no person could be identified from the survey. If the refugee agreed, then the interview commenced. The field assistant asked each question to the respondent in Vietnamese, and the answer was translated from Vietnamese to English by the field assistant, and recorded by the researcher in a hardcover book. The responses were not recorded on individual questionnaires because of the difficulty in obtaining high quality photocopies, and the personal preference for recording responses in a book, which is easier to manage, more secure and allows more detailed responses to be written.

The UNHCR Resettlement Officer offered an office in the UNHCR complex to conduct interviews, but this was declined. Instead, all interviews were conducted in the refugees' billets, so that the respondents could talk in comfortable and familiar surroundings, and not be intimidated by official surroundings. It also reinforced the idea
that the research was not part of an agency or government, who would usually use such offices.

Initially, interviews were conducted in both the morning and afternoon, with a break for lunch. However, it proved difficult to recruit respondents in the afternoon, when most Vietnamese preferred to rest and escape the hot and uncomfortable conditions. Therefore the strategy was changed so that interviews were conducted in the mornings and again at night. While there were few problems recruiting potential respondents in the morning, it did prove more difficult in the evening, when many people elected to visit friends or go for a walk. Therefore, it was decided to approach respondents and make an appointment to conduct the interviews at night. This tactic proved extremely effective.

The duration of interviews ranged from just under two hours to over five hours, with the average being slightly more than two hours and thirty minutes. At the completion of each interview the respondent was asked whether they had a contact address in Australia where they could be contacted the following year. The field assistant explained that it was anticipated that a second series of interviews would be conducted with this same group of refugees after they had resettled to Australia, and asked whether the respondent would agree to another interview.

Details from the interviews were entered into computer daily, as a safety precaution to guard against the possible loss of questionnaires, as well as to assist later data analysis. The information was entered in free text form using the ASKSAM program, under a number of informal headings to assist retrieval later. However, a computer malfunction in late July prevented further data entry, and the task was not completed until mid-1995.30

During the survey period ten life histories were constructed, as proposed in the ethnosurvey research approach. A snowballing selection procedure was adopted to

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30 The interviews were entered in Microsoft Word format, which enabled the NUD.IST software program to be used to assist the analysis of data.
recruit respondents for the life histories, with one prerequisite: the respondent should have a good command of English. The life history respondents were not required to have been approved for resettlement to Australia, although half of the respondents had already been selected. Persons were recruited for the life histories on the recommendations of fellow refugees as being persons held in high regard in the refugee community and worthy of interviewing. The topics covered by the life histories were basically the same as those later asked in the survey. The respondent was asked about conditions in Vietnam prior to their escape, how they organised their escape and the actual flight from Vietnam, life in the first asylum camp, the refugee determination process, life in the transit centre, and aspirations for the future. There was no particular structure to the interview, rather an informal discussion of the person’s life. Many of the life histories were constructed over multiple meetings, rather than a single interview. If respondents agreed, the interviews were recorded on a small tape-recorder. However, a number of respondents preferred not to be recorded, so notes were taken long hand.31 The ten life histories are an excellent adjunct to the data collected in the survey. One of the major benefits of the life history as a research instrument was that the return visits allowed follow-up questions to extract more detailed information.

Narratives obtained from interviews and life histories and used in the following chapters have not been corrected for grammar, but remain in the language used by the translators. Hopefully this provides a more realistic account of events.

As mentioned previously, participant observation of daily experiences in the camp was undertaken throughout the period of field work—from the time of arrival in the camp through to the day of departure. Observations were generally recorded in small notebooks carried at all times, and later transferred onto computer. Hundreds of pages of notes were recorded from participant observation, containing details gleaned

31 For example, one respondent who requested that the interview not be recorded claimed that he had made many enemies in the UNHCR and the Philippines government during his appeal for refugee status, and was frightened that someone could use the tape against him.
from numerous observations. These notes were later broken down into over one hundred topics and were an important information resource on camp life. In addition, a field work diary was kept of the research, including daily observations, interviews and other events in the camp.

An unexpected source of information arose from assisting some refugees write to officials of the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs at the Australian Embassy in Manila. Following interviews respondents frequently asked for assistance with their case. In most instances there was a logical explanation to the delay in processing, such as health requirements, and the respondents were reassured that they would be resettled soon. However, there were a number of cases where there was no apparent reason why the family had not already been resettled. In such instances a letter advising of the delay and requesting that the case be re-examined was written to the head of the Immigration Section in the Embassy. Embassy staff responded to these requests, and as a result, a number of cases were resettled shortly after the letters were written. In addition, the Immigration Department staff of the Australian Embassy in Manila were exceptionally helpful in other matters and provided some further insights on Vietnamese refugee resettlement to Australia.

The final weeks of research at the RRTC were spent collecting data from camp records. The RRTC card registration system was again accessed, and provided basic demographic data on 1,347 persons in the camp. Unfortunately, the card registration system is not able to supply complete and detailed information on the camp population. However, it still provided some useful information on the camp population.

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32 Vietnamese assistants filled in the cards during the processing of new arrivals, which occurred immediately upon their arrival in the camp, and after a long and uncomfortable journey from Manila. The degree of completeness in the card details has varied considerably over the years, from extremely little to almost complete, depending upon the assistants at the time. The cards have primarily been used to record the details of each PRA, with less emphasis on information on other members of the case. However, even the information on the PRA is often incomplete, with details such as religion, education and occupation frequently missing.
THE ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER

It is important to establish the role the researcher played in this research. It is quite apparent that the research was restricted by the researcher's scant knowledge of the Vietnamese language, which meant that he had to rely on a translator in most of the interviews. The use of a translator had both negative and positive aspects. It is possible that using a translator could have caused problems with exact translations. Although this may have been a possibility, it is not considered to have been highly likely. Both the translators employed during the main survey had very high standards of English language. In addition, they were also going through the refugee experience at that time, so knew what the respondents were talking about. In the small number of interviews where the respondents answered in English, there were no apparent changes in responses from those where the answers were translated. This indicates a high degree of consistency with translations.

The fact that both translators were going through the transit stage of the refugee experience at the time of interviews was a positive attribute as they knew what the current situation was. In fact, they were able to provide addition information on some aspects of the refugee experience, and clarify issues and terminology for the researcher. The translators also kept the researcher informed about issues arising in this and other camps that he may otherwise not have been aware of. Another benefit was that the interpreters provided an introduction to other refugees and possibly increased acceptance of the study. The arrival of a fellow refugee at a refugee’s door asking whether they would be prepared to answer questions on their refugee experience may

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33 The one area where both interpreters did not have any experience was with the Hong Kong detention centres, as they had both sought asylum in the Philippines. However, this does not appear to have caused any problems.

34 A complaint about some of the interpreters used in the screening process in Hong Kong was that they had fled Vietnam many years previously, and thus were not able to comment or translate adequately about contemporary situations.
have been more acceptable than the arrival of a solitary and unknown Australian researcher.

This raises the question of how the researcher was accepted by the refugees? It is impossible to gauge how the refugees perceived the researcher and whether they harboured deep suspicions about him and the research activities. Although most respondents were inquisitive about what the researcher was doing, only four people declined to be interviewed, while 108 agreed. This indicates the strong willingness of refugees to participate in the research. Furthermore, many of the respondents asked the researcher to socialise with them and their family—either by having a meal, a beer or just talking with them—which indicates a high degree of acceptance in the refugee community (and Vietnamese hospitality).

The researcher’s face was well known in the camp by the time interviews commenced, as he had been living in the camp for nearly four months. The researcher also benefited from the presence of four Australian Cultural Orientation teachers, and various other volunteers from other countries, in the camp during early 1994. The volunteers were generally held in high regard by most refugees for their assistance to refugees.

The researcher made a conscious decision to help refugees whenever possible, which led to an increasing number of contacts to the Australian Embassy on behalf of different refugees. Increasingly, the researcher became almost a “first point of contact” when a problem with resettlement to Australia arose. It is impossible to determine whether this was because the number of other avenues for assistance was decreasing at the same time, or because of the researcher’s profile and good reputation in the camp. It was probably a combination of the two.

It is also important to assess how the refugees responded to the researcher and his enquiries? Throughout fieldwork, the researcher perceived that he was generally given truthful responses to his questions. In some instances the refugees claimed to
provide him with information that they considered “secret” and which was not to be told to the Australian authorities. This apparent trust was probably a reflection of the emphasis that the researcher placed on his independence and the confidentiality of his research, which was discussed before interviews commenced. It may also be due to the researcher’s good reputation in the refugee community.

It was, however, noticeable during many interviews that refugees were well acquainted with the United Nations’ criteria for obtaining refugee status and in fact most emphasised their persecution in Vietnam. This is no doubt a reflection of them living in first asylum camps and detention centres for years, awaiting refugee status determination. During this period they undoubtedly became so familiar with the United Nations Convention and Protocol that they structured their life and difficulties in Vietnam around the United Nations refugee criteria. In fact, they had to do this in order to obtain refugee status. As a result, when they were asked in the course of the interview why they fled Vietnam, respondents frequently recited their circumstances in Vietnam in accordance with established United Nations principles for obtaining refugee status. This is not to say that their reasons for fleeing Vietnam were contrived, but rather that their answers had previously been structured to provide them the best opportunity to obtain refugee status. They were merely reciting these reasons.

**RRTC POPULATION**

The RRTC population was continuously changing through the arrival of new refugees from Hong Kong, and to a lesser extent, Palawan and the departure of people to resettlement countries, primarily Australia, Canada and the United States. The composition of the population changed over the years, with refugees from Hong Kong

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35 On the whole, refugees generally argued that they fled Vietnam because they were being persecuted. In comparison, persons leaving Vietnam through the ODP rarely mentioned persecution in Vietnam, although they were likely to have been persecuted in some way.
making up an increasing proportion of the camp population in the final years (Figure 4.4).

In 1990, refugees from PFAC (Philippines) represented almost two-thirds (63.3%) of RRTC arrivals, but by 1994 they comprised just over ten per cent (10.5%) of the camp population. The RRTC population changed considerably during 1994. At the beginning of the year there were 731 (44.2%) refugees from Palawan (PFAC), 922 (55.6%) from Hong Kong and 4 (0.2%) ex-China cases resident in the camp, but by the end of September the numbers had changed to 332 (25.4%) from Palawan, 968 (74.1%) from Hong Kong and 7 ex-China (0.5%) (Table 4.2).

### Table 4.2

**RRTC Population, by Sex and Country of First Asylum, September 1994**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Asylum country</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Philippines (RS cases)</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>345</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong (TC cases)</td>
<td>543</td>
<td>459</td>
<td>1002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>740</td>
<td>607</td>
<td>1347</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field study, 1994

At the end of field work there was a higher proportion of males (54.9%) than females (45.1%) in the camp population, with the proportion higher among Philippines (RS) cases (57.0%) than in Hong Kong (TC) cases (54.2%) (Table 4.2). The age-sex structure of the RRTC population shows a somewhat surprising distribution, with the largest group being females in the 25–29 year age group—12.0 per cent of the total population—followed by males (8.5%) in the same age group (Figure 4.6). The 20–24 year olds were the second largest age group, with the proportion of females (7.9%) again larger than males (6.7%). It is also interesting to note that the infant age group (0–4 year olds) is the third largest age group overall. The majority of these children were born in first asylum camps or at the RRTC.
Statistics compiled on the camp population reveal that the average case size was 2.1 persons. Over half (53.3%) of all cases were single persons, with single males comprising almost three-quarters (72.6%) of the single cases. The sex distribution in all other cases was almost equal. The largest family size was nine persons, with two such families in camp (Table 4.3). There were twenty-six cases from Hong Kong with six or more persons, yet only two similar sized cases from Palawan. A more detailed description of the composition of cases was made by analysing data in the sampling frame.36

36 It should be pointed out that there are bound to be differences in the attributes of the sampling frame population when comparing it with the total camp population discussed above. The sampling frame was compiled on 14 April 1994, and contained details of all refugees in the camp who had been accepted by the Australian Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs. The Australian delegation visited the camp in late-February 1994 to conduct interviews, and then again in June that year. Therefore, the sampling frame does not contain any refugees who arrived in the camp after February 1994, and possibly even January. The camp statistics discussed above are representative of the population at the end of September 1994.
Table 4.3

Family Size by Country of First Asylum (persons), RRTC September 1994

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country of First Asylum</th>
<th>Family Size (persons)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines (RS cases)</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong (TC cases)</td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persons</td>
<td>343</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field study, 1994

THE SAMPLING FRAME POPULATION

The sampling frame consisted of 433 persons in 190 cases who had been accepted for resettlement to Australia. Refugees from Hong Kong comprised slightly more than half (103 or 54.2%) of all sampling frame cases, and almost two-thirds (283 or 64.5%) of persons on the list. This irregularity was due to the large number of small cases in the refugee population from PFAC, with more than six in every ten RS cases (63.2%) being single person units, and only thirteen cases (14.9%) with three persons or more. In contrast, less than one-third (32.0%) of Hong Kong cases were single person cases, and over half (51.5%) contained three or more persons (Table 4.4).

Almost half (46.3% or 88) of the cases in the sampling frame were single persons, with almost double the number of single male cases (58 persons) compared with single female cases (30). There were also higher proportions of males in three, four and nine person cases, whereas females outnumbered males in two, five and eight person cases, with equal numbers in six and seven person cases (Table 4.5). It is somewhat surprising to discover that there were considerably more females than males in two person cases. The forty-one females in two-person cases included seventeen
PRAs, eleven wives, nine daughters and four sisters, while nineteen male PRAs, seven sons, four brothers and one stepson comprised the thirty-one males in two person cases.

### Table 4.4

**Case Size of Sampling Frame Population by Country of First Asylum (persons), April 1994**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country of First Asylum</th>
<th>Case Size (persons)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines (RS cases)</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong (TC cases)</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total persons</strong></td>
<td>88</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field study, 1994

It is important to point out that the case size from the sampling frame was not necessarily the same as the family size. In a small number of instances, particularly with refugees transferred from Hong Kong, one or more of the family members was sometimes transferred later than the rest of the family and consequently was not on the sampling frame when it was constructed. This usually happened when a refugee who had been rejected for refugee status married a person with refugee status. The former generally had to wait for their papers to be processed before they joined their spouse.

There was a higher proportion of males (53.1%) than females (46.9%) in the sample population, with males more numerous in the Philippine (RS) sub-population—87 males compared to 62 females—than in the Hong Kong (TC) sub-population, where there were 143 males and 141 females.

The sampling frame population was a good representation of the RRTC population in all age groups except one. There were only half the percentage of females
aged between twenty-five and twenty-nine years in the sampling frame population compared with the total RRTC population (12.0%) (Figures 4.6 and 4.7).

The only plausible explanation for the under-representation in the sampling frame list is that a large number of women in this age group had been selected for resettlement to countries other than Australia, where they have existing family connections.

Table 4.5
Case Size of Sampling Frame Population by Sex (persons), April 1994

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Case Size (persons)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Persons</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Cases</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field study, 1994

Figure 4.7
Age-Sex Structure of Sampling Frame Population, April 1994

Source: Field study, 1994
THE SURVEY POPULATION

The survey interviewed 108 Principal Refugee Applicants (PRAs): seventy-five males and thirty-three females. The decision to use PRAs as respondents is a logical decision, as the refugee determination process was based on the application made by the PRA. It would have been inconsistent to use another sampling method to select respondents that would not have allowed PRAs to be interviewed.

The most numerous respondents were males aged between twenty-five and twenty-nine years (eighteen persons), followed by sixteen males aged between thirty and thirty-four years and twelve males aged between thirty-five and thirty-nine years (Figure 4.8). There was a far more even distribution of females, especially in age groups from twenty to twenty-four years through to forty to forty-four years. However, females were the youngest—eighteen years—and oldest—seventy-seven years—persons interviewed. Females were most prevalent in the thirty-five to thirty-nine year age group (seven persons).

Almost four out of every ten respondents (37.0% or 40 persons) were a single person case, with a considerably higher proportion of males (62.5%) than females (37.5%). Over half these single case respondents were either married (14 persons or 42.4%) or previously married—one person (3.0%) divorced and three persons (9.1%) widowed. Three-quarters (75.0%) of all respondents were married, while almost twenty per cent (19.4%) were single. The remainder had all been married, but were now either separated (0.9%), divorced (1.9%) or widowed (2.8%).

The vast majority (eighty-seven or 80.6%) of respondents were ethnic Vietnamese, with a sizeable (nineteen or 17.6%) Hoa (Vietnamese-Chinese) minority. In addition, there was one respondent who was a Cham and another who was a Nung—both small ethnic minorities in Vietnam.

---

37 This male bias in single person cases among PRAs was a reflection of the bias in the sampling frame, where 58 (65.9%) of the 88 single person cases were male and only 30 cases (34.1%) female.
Two-thirds (72 or 66.7%) of all respondents had lived in the former South Vietnam before they escaped, with one-third of all southerners (or 24 persons) previously living in Ho Chi Minh City province (Table 4.6). Other major provinces of origin in the South were Khanh Hoa (fourteen persons)—which includes the coastal city of Nha Trang—Thua Thien-Hue (7 persons), Quang Nam-Da Nang (7 persons) and Dong Nai (6 persons). Almost sixty per cent (21 persons or 58.3%) of the thirty-six northern respondents had previously lived in the coastal port city of Hai Phong.

The youthful age of respondents is also reflected in the large number of persons (sixteen or 14.8%) who stated that they were students in Vietnam before they escaped, which is the largest of all “occupation” categories (Table 4.7). The vast majority of respondents were tradespersons, with only small numbers of professional persons, rural workers and
people involved in business. The most numerous occupations among the different trades were dressmaking (nine persons) and tailoring (eight persons), followed by auto-mechanics and carpenters (both six persons). Rural workers only accounted for twelve per cent of respondents, and comprised six farmers, five fisherpersons and two rubber workers. Teachers were the most common professional occupation (five persons), as well as one university lecturer. Other professional categories included an accountant, doctor and lawyer (one each). There were relatively few people involved in business activities, with street vendors (five persons) the most common.

Table 4.6
Place of Origin (Province) of Principal Refugee Applicant Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROVINCE</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ho Chi Minh City</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>22.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hai Phong</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>19.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khanh Hoa</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quang Ninh</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thua Thien-Hue</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quang Nam-Da Nang</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dong Nai</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phu Yen</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben Tre</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ha Tien</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hai Hung</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ha Noi</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Binh Dinh</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dac Lac</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gia Lai</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lam Dong</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ninh Thuan</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quang Nai</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Song Be</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thai Binh</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tien Giang</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>108</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field study, 1994
Table 4.7
Occupation of respondents in Vietnam

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OCCUPATION</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>14.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dressmaker</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tailor</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auto mechanic</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carpenter</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fisherperson</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vendor</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction worker</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electrician</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Driver</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Painter</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plastics worker</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubber worker</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welder</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountant</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accupunturist</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artist</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baker</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barber</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bricklayer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Businessperson</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctor</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Draughtsperson</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factory employee</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fitter and turner</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forklift driver</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goldsmith</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hairdresser</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospital assistant</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lawyer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Store manager</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noodle maker</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurse</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Painter</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photographer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical therapist</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policeperson</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sportsperson</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not in workforce</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>108</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a - May not add up to 100.0% due to rounding errors.

Source: Field study, 1994
Over half (54.6%) of all respondents were Buddhists, and more than one-third (36.1%) were Christians, with almost one-quarter (24.6%) of all respondents proclaiming to be Catholics (Table 4.8). Six persons (5.6%) practised ancestor worship and two persons (1.9%) belonged to the Cao Dai religion.  

Table 4.8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RELIGION</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Buddhist</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>54.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>24.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ancestor worship</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cao Dai</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evangelical</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mormon</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Christian</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>108</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong>*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Due to rounding errors may not add up to 100.0%

Source: Field study, 1994

Survey respondents were a very diverse group of persons who accurately represented the Vietnamese refugee population at RRTC during the early part of 1994. Interviews with these persons proved to be an excellent source of information on the early and middle stages of the refugee experience. However, to complete the study it was necessary to incorporate further research in different locations, as is detailed below.

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38 Some Vietnamese practice more than one religion. For example, it is not unusual for a person to practice ancestor worship as well as a mainstream religion, such as Buddhism. The survey question merely asked “What religion do you practice?”
SUPPLEMENTARY RESEARCH

Research at the RRTC was completed in mid-October, before travelling to Manila and onto Palawan. Permission to enter the Palawan camp, which had previously been denied by TFIRAA in Manila, was again rejected by the Office of South East Asian Affairs and later by PFAC security at the camp itself. Although entry to the camp was not granted, talks were held with four Vietnamese asylum-seekers who were known from the RRTC. Informal discussions with these people were held at the front gates, through the iron mesh fence and in the town of Puerto Princesa. They provided some additional details of the deteriorating situation within the PFAC. The final week in the Philippines was spent in Manila finalising affairs, including visits to a number of agency and government offices to collect secondary data.

In November the researcher travelled to Thailand, where it was hoped to visit the Phanat Nikhom refugee camp and processing centre. However, enquiries made by a refugee agency on the researcher’s behalf found that access to this camp had also been severely curtailed, and entry was not permitted. The limited time in Thailand was spent obtaining additional statistics on the refugee situation in Thailand and meeting persons working with refugees in the country.

After Thailand, three weeks were spent in Vietnam travelling from Ho Chi Minh City to Hanoi. The purpose of this trip was to gain a greater understanding of Vietnam. It must be emphasised that it was never going to be possible to experience the conditions that forced millions of persons to flee the country. Furthermore, the rapid change evident in Vietnam meant that conditions in 1994 were far different from those experienced by the target population before their escape from the country between 1989 and 1992. However, it did provide some useful insights into Vietnamese culture and geography.

39 One of these respondents had been staying with his wife at RRTC, one had visited his uncle, one was allowed a temporary stay because her infant daughter had refugee status but she did not, and one person had travelled to RRTC and back illegally.
The final three weeks of overseas field work were spent in Hong Kong. A considerable amount of this time was spent obtaining permission from the Hong Kong government to visit one of the detention camps in the colony. Eventually, permission was granted to visit the infamous Whitehead Detention Centre for a morning, on the condition that no interviews were conducted with any asylum seekers. Section 10 of the Whitehead complex—an area reserved for asylum-seekers who have volunteered for repatriation to Vietnam—was visited, including barrack-type accommodation units, a kitchen, vocational school, and other facilities. After the visit a request was made—and granted—to meet a Vietnamese woman who was the younger sister of a friend from RRT. An hour—the allocated time for all visits—was spent talking to this young woman in the visitor’s centre about life in the Whitehead camp, her family in RRTC, and other matters.

The remaining time in Hong Kong was spent attempting to meet officials and people involved in refugee assistance. Unfortunately contacts with persons in Hong Kong were not very strong, and a number of people were out of the colony for Christmas. It would have been beneficial to have spent longer in Hong Kong, but the financial costs of an extended stay were prohibitive.

The researcher returned to Australia at the beginning of January 1995. Meetings were arranged that month with three families who had resettled to Adelaide the previous year, to discuss their early resettlement experiences in Australia. In late March, forty letters were written to those refugees previously interviewed in the Philippines who had supplied a contact address in either Melbourne or Sydney, and were known to have resettled. The letter advised them of the continuing research on Vietnamese refugees and requested meeting them to discuss their resettlement in Australia. Enclosed with each letter was a card, written in Vietnamese, requesting their current address, together with a reply-paid envelope. Replies were received from less than half the letters sent out, some many months later. The high mobility rate among Vietnamese refugees after their arrival in Australia meant that most of the original addresses were no longer valid.
In late April and early-May, follow-up interviews were conducted in Sydney with some recently resettled respondents from the earlier survey. The process of locating the refugees proved far more difficult than originally anticipated, especially as the refugees had scattered throughout Sydney. Even where a current address had been obtained from the letters, it proved difficult to find the refugees at home. It is presumed that most of the refugees were attending English classes when their homes were visited, and possibly a few were at work, or had shifted addresses. The addresses of those refugees who replied to the letter were visited at least twice in an attempt to meet them. Transportation difficulties and safety concerns meant that only a few of the areas were visited at night.

Only four refugee families from the original sample were located and interviewed in Sydney. An informal discussion on their life in Australia was adopted for the interviews, rather than a structured approach. In all cases more than one meeting with the refugees was held, a product of Vietnamese hospitality. The Vietnamese also introduced other members of their family and Vietnamese friends, who provided some insights to the longer term aspects of refugee resettlement. One additional refugee was interviewed later in the year upon a return visit to Sydney.

Staff from a number of community organizations in Sydney that assist refugees were also interviewed to discuss aspects of refugee resettlement. Personnel at the Vietnamese Community of Australia, Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors (STARTTS), the Vietnamese Buddhist Federation of Australia, and the Indo-Chinese Refugee Association were extremely helpful in providing additional information. In late June 1995 a conference commemorating twenty years of Vietnamese refugee resettlement in Australia was attended in Sydney.

The research moved to Melbourne in June to undertake the study’s final data collection. The study adopted the same procedures as had previously been used in Sydney, although this time there were fewer transport difficulties, as a car was available. As a result, eight families were located and interviewed, scattered throughout
Melbourne. In five of the eight cases, discussions with the refugees were held on more than one occasion to discuss resettlement and life in Australia. In two cases the researcher was asked to assist with enquiries about family members who were still in the Philippines. Information from the refugees was again supplemented with facts obtained from different Vietnamese associations in Melbourne.

Only seventy-six of the original 108 refugee cases (70.4%) interviewed in the Philippines had resettled by the completion of field work. Of these, eight cases (7.4%) resettled to cities not visited: Brisbane (five cases or 4.6%) and Alice Springs (three cases or 2.8%). Contact addresses of sponsors or family were available for only forty-three of the original respondents who had resettled to Melbourne (23), Sydney (16), Adelaide (4) and Canberra (0). However, only sixteen refugees were “reinterviewed” in follow-up interviews. Despite the poor success rate, the results from these interviews provided some useful insights into the early resettlement stage of refugee migration that will be discussed fully in Chapter 8.

**SUMMARY**

This chapter has provided details of both the research strategies and the different environments within which field enquiries were conducted. The qualitative techniques adopted during field work in the Philippines were extremely valuable sources of information on the Vietnamese refugee experience to that point in time. In addition, they also presented some insights into the forthcoming resettlement of refugees to Australia.

The information obtained during field work, together with the earlier historical description of this exodus out of Vietnam, is more than sufficient to develop a stages model of the Vietnamese refugee experience under the CPA. The following three chapters will describe these stages in detail, beginning with the first three stages of the
refugee experience—the conditions in Vietnam, the decision to flee, and flight from Vietnam—in Chapter 5.
LIVING IN HELL
AND THE DECISION TO FLEE

From Ape to Man took millions of years.
I'll set you a riddle,
See if you can guess, From Man to Beast,
how many will it take?

Let the whole world come and see,
In the deep forests of Vietnam
The concentration camps
Where the naked inmates crouch
in their jungle jails
Bathing like herds together
Sleeping midst lice and mosquitoes
In the dark foul-stinting air
Ready to fight for a root
Ready to kill for a yam
Chained up
Shot, broken, smashed
At their captors merest whim
Their bodies thrown away for rats to gnaw.
These apes are slow not agile
like their primitive predecessors
They are racked with hunger
Thin as toothpicks
Let the whole world come and see!

From Ape to Man took millions of years
But did you guess?,
The miracle policy
In my country.

Nguyen Chi Thien (1989:40)
INTRODUCTION

A critical element in understanding refugee migration is identifying why people flee their country—or using the “push-pull” terminology sometimes used in migration vernacular—detecting the “push” factors that forced people to leave their homeland against their will. Allen and Hiller (1985:441) have argued that refugee migrations only occur when acute social unrest causes dissatisfaction or distress. Bulcha (1988:79) concurs that refugee movements are the products of social conflicts. He adds that “they are results of preceding events that are intelligible in terms of historical development of a given society and its component parts, classes and ethnic groups, and international processes that intersect with the domestic forces”. Therefore, it is logical that the first step towards understanding the underlying reasons for refugee movements should be an investigation of the changing conditions in the country of origin that caused extreme adversity to elements of the population and left escape as their preferred alternative. To understand why more than a million Vietnamese risked their lives on the South China Sea, it is essential to examine the changing conditions in that country since 1975—especially government policies and programs that affected a significant portion of the population.

This chapter examines the first three stages of the Vietnamese refugee experience. It commences with the first stage—“Conditions in Vietnam”—which investigates government policies implemented against sections of the Vietnamese population in the post-war period. It examines living conditions in Vietnam by incorporating data obtained during the 1994 field study with historical sources. It is important to emphasise that some of the information provided is a generalisation of conditions in Vietnam, and that there were often exceptions evident in Vietnamese society. Furthermore, even though a significant segment of the Vietnamese population was subjected to adverse living conditions, only a relatively small proportion of the population ever took flight as refugees. Therefore, it is imperative that the factors that influenced refugees to flee are investigated, which is the second stage—“The Decision
to Flee”. This uses the 1994 field study that questioned refugees on why they escaped from Vietnam and how they organised their escapes. It concludes by looking at “Flight”—the third stage of the refugee experience—and the different modes, routes and problems of escape journeys, including some detailed refugee narratives of the boat journeys.

CONDITIONS IN VIETNAM

It should be pointed out that the people of Vietnam endured difficult conditions for decades as the divided country fought a thirty year civil war. During that time, much of the population—in both North and South Vietnam—were subjected to poor living conditions, lack of human rights, inadequate infrastructure, etc. as military requirements took precedence over the people’s needs. However, conditions for many Vietnamese deteriorated markedly after 1975, especially in the former South Vietnam.

COMMUNIST RETRIBUTION

It had been widely anticipated that a “bloodbath” would follow in the immediate aftermath of the fall of South Vietnam as the communists extracted revenge for thirty years of fighting, suffering and destruction. Surprisingly, Duiker (1989:1) claimed that there was “little evidence of widespread bloodshed” upon the establishment of revolutionary rule in Vietnam. However, others—including, the Aurora Foundation (1989), Desbarats (1990a), Nguyen (1983) and Sagan and Denney (1980)—have more realistically claimed that tens of thousands of army and government officials were executed immediately after the communist takeover. This was despite assurances by Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV) authorities that there would be no reprisals against former regime members (Nguyen, 1983:125).

Desbarats (1990a:194) found evidence among documents in the Vietnamese public records that indicated “a large program of post-liberation executions” was
initiated, and this is supported by empirical data collected during interviews. She claimed that the execution program was political in its intent, and directed at government officials of the former regime, members of the *comprador bourgeoisie*, some ethnic and religious leaders, a small number of people who attempted to escape from the country, and a large number of people who tried to escape from reeducation camps (Desbarats, 1990a:195–196). The accused were frequently brought before military management committees and “people’s courts”, where the judicial figures had no legal experience and the accused had no legal protection or rights to appeal. Charges were generally “vague and flimsy” and did not address particular transgressions of specific laws. The penalties meted out were extreme—far more severe than normally found in international law—with victims officially, and in some cases publicly, executed. The full extent of these executions will never be known, but the Aurora Foundation (1989:36) estimated that at least 65,000 people were executed for political reasons between 1975 and 1983. Desbarats (1990a:196) initially agreed with this number, but in light of more recent statistical calculations stated that it is probably an underestimation. She proposed that the number was possibly more than 100,000 people.

Although executions were widespread, they were not the mainstay of the new government’s retribution. Instead, the communists instigated a far more systematic policy of revenge upon millions of people considered to have a “bad family background” because they—or a family member—were:

- a former member of the South Vietnam military;
- a former employee of the South Vietnam government;
- sent to a reeducation camp;

---

1 Survey data were obtained from over eight hundred interviews with Vietnamese refugees in France and the United States.

2 The former officials included province chiefs, district chiefs, mayors, members of the police forces, high-ranking members of the army, and members of the intelligence community (Desbarats, 1990a:195).

3 It should be pointed out that public executions were not a new initiative and have been part of the Vietnamese legal system since before French colonisation.
The consequences of the communists’ retribution were severe, including imprisonment, political indoctrination, confiscation of property, forced relocation, discrimination in employment and education, torture and even death.

**Reeducation**

The principal means of retribution against those persons previously associated with the South Vietnamese regime was through “thought reform” or “reeducation” (cao tao or cao tao tu tuong). Reeducation of persons considered “obstinate counter-revolutionaries” had been policy in North Vietnam since 1961, and by the time the communists came to power in April 1975, the reeducation program had evolved into a comprehensive and organised system based on hard labour and political indoctrination.

Initially, the main target of this retribution was former officers of the ARVN and senior South Vietnam administrators. It commenced with a communiqué issued by the communist Military Management Section on 3 May 1975 that informed all former ARVN soldiers and officers that they were required to register with the new regime at designated offices between 4 and 6 May. This was followed by another communiqué issued on 7 May, ordering current ARVN personnel to report and register on specified days, according to their rank. A separate order also issued that day decreed that all teachers, civil servants, policemen, and members of the executive, judicial and

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4 The categories listed for bad family backgrounds are a generalisation and by no means exclusive.
5 The Democratic Republic of Vietnam’s Resolution 49 of 1961 called for the educational reform of “counter-revolutionary elements who continue to be culpable of acts which threaten public security”. The Democratic Republic of Vietnam’s Council of Ministers issued General Circular No. 121-CP in 1961 which further detailed the basic tenets of “reeducation” (Aurora Foundation, 1989:39-40).
6 The communiqués ordered generals to report on 8 and 9 May; colonels from 8 to 11 May; and other commissioned officers from 8 to 14 May. NCOs and private soldiers, plus all military personnel attached to civilian agencies, were ordered to report “in the same way as others on active duty” (Nguyen, 1983:190).
legislative branches of the former government of the Republic of Vietnam were also required to register (Nguyen, 1983:190).

On 10 June, the Military Management Committee ordered all soldiers, noncommissioned officers, civilian employees of the ARVN, and low-ranking personnel of the former administration to attend three days of reeducation or "reform study" (hoc tap) from 11 to 13 June, at designated places in the localities where they had registered. The former regime employees attended classes in local city wards during the day, and were permitted to return to their homes at night. Most of the reeducatees were released at the end of the three day period, although some were detained for longer periods, especially those who had served with the rangers, marines, airborne or intelligence corps. The treatment of this initial group during the reeducation program conveyed the impression that the new regime would treat their former enemies leniently. Unbeknown at the time, those who followed were not to be treated so lightly (Aurora Foundation, 1989:30).

On 20 June, junior military officers and members of the auxiliary forces were ordered by the Saigon Military Management Committee to report for "reeducation" at designated centres according to their rank, and to bring sufficient supplies for ten days. Similar communiqués were issued to high-ranking military officers, senior government officials, civil servants, and legislators to report, but they were ordered to bring sufficient supplies to last them for thirty days, not ten (Aurora Foundation, 1989:30; Nguyen, 1983:191–192).

7 The communiqué for junior officers stated:
   All officers, policemen and intelligence officers who have reported for registration shall perform thought reform at the following places:
   A. Captains to Second Lts. detached to civilian agencies will gather from June 23 [to] 24, 1975, at a number of designated centres.
   B. Captains (not detached to civilian agencies) will gather from June 23 [to] 24, 1975, at a number of different centres.
   C. Lts. will gather at designated centres from June 25 [to] 26, 1975.
   D. Second Lts., police officers from Chief Warrant Officers to Captains [and] intelligence junior cadres report from 27 [to] 28 [June], 1975, at designated centres.
   Those people gathering for education shall bring along enough paper, pens, clothes, mosquito nets, food or money for use in 10 days beginning from the date of gathering. (Nguyen, 1983:191)
With the knowledge that the first group of reeducates had only undergone three days reeducation, and with the belief that they would be protected from reprisals by Article 11 of the Paris Peace Agreements, most of the former mid- and high-ranking officials of the former regime presented themselves for reeducation expecting to be gone for only ten or thirty days, after which time they would be welcomed back into society. However, the ten and thirty day “sentences” imposed on reeducates soon passed, and it quickly became obvious that these terms were a ruse to disguise the communist regime’s vicious and vindictive policy. The South Vietnamese population had been duped into thinking that the communists would be compassionate with its former enemies. Most officers and senior officials spent many years in the notorious reeducation camps, and were placed on probation after their release and not treated as full citizens. Nguyen (1983:193) claimed that “they could be arrested, even killed, at any time without any good reason”.

At this time, a lawless rampage also swept the liberated South, with waves of arbitrary arrests as the army, local authorities and security police all arrested people who had made it onto their respective lists. There were no laws governing who was to be arrested and no apparent protection for those who were seized. Truong (1985:279) likened the arrests more to kidnappings than to legal apprehensions, and claimed that people were simply snatched from their homes or offices, or off the streets. Nguyen (1983:299) claimed that some persons were arrested merely on the word of a communist cadre or civilian informant.8

It is difficult to establish how many Vietnamese underwent reeducation. A 1977 report by Socialist Republic of Vietnam officials9 claimed that more than one million people underwent some form of reeducation, including those low ranking officials who

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8 Some South Vietnamese citizens attempted to gain favour with the new communist authorities by informing on friends, neighbours, etc.

9 In February 1977, Vo Van Sung, Vietnam’s Ambassador to France, stated that “more than one million people who have worked for the enemy but have shown repentance and demonstrated their wish to serve the nation, have been enfranchised” (cited in Nguyen, 1983:195).
attended the three day indoctrination courses (Amnesty International, 1981:3; Nguyen, 1983:195). However, in 1983, Vietnam’s Foreign Minister—Nguyen Co Thach—claimed “we had 1.5 million people in reeducation camps and 10,000 are still there now” and then two years later he stated that more than two-and-a-half million people had undergone reeducation (Desbarats, 1990a:196).

Hanoi has defended the reeducation camps against international criticism, claiming that the prisoners were “war criminals” guilty of national treason as defined in Article 3 of the 30 October 1967 Law on Counterrevolutionary Crimes, which specifies twenty years to life imprisonment or the death penalty. The SRV claimed it had adopted a “policy of leniency and generosity towards those who have collaborated with the enemy” and permitted them to undergo “reeducation without judiciary condemnation” rather than impose these sentences (Aurora Foundation, 1989:31).

**THE REEDUCATION CAMPS**

Reeducation camps were essentially concentration camps for political opponents, petty criminals and various other persons the authorities chose to detain without trial, and without any legal protection of recourse. It is estimated that there were over 150 reeducation camps scattered throughout Vietnam, and that most inmates were imprisoned in three to five different camps during their reeducation. According to Sagan and Denney (1980:4), prisoners were transferred from one camp to another to ensure that their whereabouts remained unknown to relatives and also to prevent prisoners from forming strong friendships with each other or with guards.

Amnesty International (1981) described four categories of reeducation camps:

(a) detention centres in towns where the initial inquiries were held;
(b) second-category camps which held both criminal and political prisoners, and where detainees were encouraged to write accounts of their backgrounds;
(c) third-category camps where prisoners were held according to the nature of their alleged past offences;\textsuperscript{10} and

(d) camps for former senior officers and members of intelligence services who had been judged "ac on" (wicked), which were mostly situated north of Hanoi. Nguyen (1983:204) claimed that, in addition to high-ranking prisoners, the northern camps also contained those who had "committed serious crimes against the people" and who owed a "blood debt to the people". A camp’s proximity to Hanoi reflected the seriousness with which prisoners' "crimes against the people" were regarded. The southern camps were more specialised, with some camps for ARVN officers, and others for those arrested attempting to escape from the country.

The number of prisoners in the camps varied considerably, and it is estimated that some camps held as many as 6,000 prisoners, although between 2,000 and 4,000 prisoners was probably a more typical size. Refugee accounts of fourteen camps in December 1981 and January 1982 put the average camp population at slightly more than 3,000 persons (Nguyen, 1983:199). If all 150 reeducation camps averaged this number of prisoners, the total reeducation population at the beginning of 1982—almost seven years after they were introduced—would have been in the vicinity of 450,000 persons. However, government authorities claimed that there were only 40,000 reeducation prisoners in 1981 (Desbarats, 1990b:55).\textsuperscript{11}

Conditions in the reeducation camps also varied greatly, depending on factors such as their location, the composition of prisoners in the particular camp, and the administrators of the camp. However, it is fair to say that the situation in all camps was

\textsuperscript{10} Prisoners were incarcerated in certain camps according to their rank and level of prominence in the former regime, with low-ranking officers imprisoned in certain camps in southern Vietnam, while high-ranking officers and officials were generally sent to other camps in northern Vietnam (Aurora Foundation, 1989:41).

\textsuperscript{11} Desbarats (1990b:55) argued that the Vietnamese government issued "inconsistent and contradictory figures" on the number of inmates in the reeducation camps. She claimed that according to some Vietnamese refugees, the numbers of reeducation prisoners were disguised by reclassifying them as "common criminals". Estimates on the number of prisoners in the reeducation camps varied between 40,000 (Asia Watch Committee) and 90,000 persons (U.S. State Department), while some unnamed Western humanitarian groups put the number at half a million (Desbarats, 1990b:55).
severe, with insufficient food supplies, virtually no medical care, and strict disciplinary regimes that saw any violation of the rules result in punishment, torture or even death (Aurora Foundation, 1989:3).

Initially, the first two to three months of the reeducation program were devoted to intensive political indoctrination, involving lectures, group discussions and writing essays. Key elements of the program also involved repetitive self-criticism and mutual criticism, together with family autobiographies, and “confessions” of the alleged past “crimes” prisoners committed against the state. The Aurora Foundation (1989:42) alleged that prisoners falsely confessed to crimes to avoid ill treatment by the cadres, who beat those who refused to confess or reduced their already meagre food rations.

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12 The reeducation curriculum, reconstructed by Dr. Le Kim Ngan, ex-president of Phuong Nam University (cited in Nguyen, 1983:208–209), involved the following subjects:

**Stage I** – Ten weeks, with eight subjects.
2. American Imperialism (or neo-colonialism), an enemy of the people.
3. Crimes committed against our people by American imperialism.
4. Reasons why the Vietnamese people were victorious.
5. History of the Vietnamese people’s struggle (from Chinese domination to French domination).
7. Socialism.

Another week was spent studying “crimes committed by oneself”. Each trainee, before the whole class, must analyse his own crimes against the people. Each trainee must participate in team discussions in the course of which self-criticism and self-denunciation are made to the team by each participant. Each team member must comment on the participant’s statements and remind him of points he may have forgotten or details he may have distorted. This is an opportunity for participants to denounce one another in order to avenge a friend and as a result, curry favour with the VCP, because the party policy is to encourage such practices. In that case he will be considered progressive and will have hopes of being released from the camp.

Finally each trainee still has to make a written twenty-page report on the outcome of his own case. In this he describes all his past crimes, begs the Revolution for a pardon, and promises to study hard to become a good citizen of the socialist regime.

**Stage II.** Four subjects studied over several weeks.
1. Reports of communist leaders such as those of Le Duan, Trong Chinh and Pham Van Dong.
2. Direction of the South Vietnamese economy.
3. The Vanguard Youth.

Approach: for each subject, three days are allocated for listening to lectures, and another three for team discussions. They are followed by one day answering questions and by one or two days to make a six-page written report on what each participant got out of the subject. (Nguyen, 1983:208–209)
The refusal to confess was taken as a rejection of “reeducation”, which resulted in an increased period of detention. The Vietnamese government used these false “confessions” as “retrospective justification” for the imprisonment of hundreds of thousands of people (Aurora Foundation, 1989:42).

Political instruction in the camps gradually declined and hard or “productive” labour increasingly became the primary emphasis of camp life, with prisoners spending eight hours a day engaged in hard and often dangerous labour, six days a week. Inmates were organised into work units, with each person and group forced to compete against each other to obtain better results.

Work in the camps was made even more arduous by the lack of food. Nguyen (1983:210) claimed that prisoners in all the camps were systematically and deliberately underfed. Former prisoners interviewed by Sagan and Denney (1980:6) stated that “the lack of food was worse than unsatisfactory”, with the typical diet consisting of one or two bowls of rice a day, with no meat and few vegetables. In Nguyen’s (1983:211) opinion, the purpose for maintaining prisoners on low food rations was to physically and psychologically “break” the prisoners. First, it kept the prisoners in a permanent state of hunger and, in association with the hard labour, physical exhaustion—making them unfit to revolt. Second, it subjected the prisoners to extreme public humiliation, as they competed and even fought among each other for food.

The meagre prisoner diet in the reeducation camps was confirmed in a letter smuggled out by one prisoner:

In my forced labour camp in the highland, the event that dominates everything is the experience of hunger. We are hungry permanently. All we can think about day and night is eating. ...The food put into the mouth is like one breath of air blown into a vast empty house. What little food is given is chewed very slowly. Still, it makes no difference—we feel even more hungry after eating. Even in our sleep, our dreams are haunted by food. (cited in Sagan, 1989:3)

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13 Some prisoners were forced to clear minefields using bamboo sticks, quarry rocks, fell trees, clear jungle, dig canals and wells, build camps and construct barracks. Some prisoners were engaged in the construction of military installations along the Cambodian border.
The poor food situation meant that malnutrition was widespread, and resulted in prisoners’ lowered resistance to many diseases, especially malaria, beriberi and dysentery. There were few medical supplies or services available to prisoners, who relied on herbal remedies except on the rare occasions they could obtain drugs. There were no doctors in the camps to tend prisoners, only nurses, although some camps allowed imprisoned doctors to treat fellow inmates, while other camps prohibited them from assisting (Nguyen, 1983:212).

The Aurora Foundation (1989:54) alleged that camp authorities maintained psychological control over the prisoners through the strict enforcement of camp regulations. Prisoners were forbidden from keeping or reading books or magazines of the former regime, conversing about the puppet South, singing old South Vietnamese love songs, discussing political questions (outside authorised discussions), fostering “reactionary” thoughts, or possessing “superstitious” beliefs (Sagan, 1980:4). Prisoners who broke the rules were subjected to severe punishment, including beatings (with large numbers beaten to death), being bound in contorted and excruciating positions, being shackled and placed in solitary confinement in darkened cells, forced to work additional hours, or reductions of already inadequate rations. Some prisoners were executed, particularly for attempting to escape from the camp.

The combination of malnutrition, physical exhaustion, disease and lack of medical services resulted in very high death rates among prisoners. For example, in Tuy Hoa camp, thirty prisoners out of 5,000 died of illness in the last three or four months of 1978 (Sagan and Denney, 1980:7). In addition, many prisoners were executed and there were large numbers of suicides. In an affirmation prepared by Hai tram hai, the

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14 This would equate to an annual crude death rate of between 18 and 24 deaths per 1,000 population. In comparison, the crude death rate in northern Vietnam in 1979 was estimated by the Ministry of Health to be 6.39/1,000, while unpublished data estimated the rate was 7.0/1,000 in 1989 for southern Vietnam (cited in Jones, 1982:790–792).

15 To ensure confidentiality, the names of all respondents are pseudonyms. This research has adopted a Vietnamese tradition where family members are given a numerical nickname e.g. Anh Hai is brother two. The names used in this research are the survey numbers from the field survey e.g. Hai muoi chin is the respondent in interview number twenty-nine.
appellant claimed that “during the time I served my [reeducation] sentence, at least sixty prisoners died because of illness, labour accidents, mine explosions, or shooting while attempting to escape. The horrible living conditions in the prison largely contributed to these deaths.” Hai tram hai suffered from tuberculosis, malaria and malnutrition while in the reeducation camp, and eventually became totally incapacitated because of tuberculosis. He was subsequently released to the Long Thanh New Economic Zone.

First-hand narratives of the barbaric treatment of prisoners and the horrific conditions within the reeducation camps have been poignantly recalled by a number of former inmates, including Doan Van Toai (with David Chanoff, 1986), Nguyen Ngoc Ngan (1982), Nguyen Van Canh (1983) and Tran Tri Vu (1988). They all expressed similar recollections of the extreme hardships, suffering and indignation suffered in the camps.

NEW ECONOMIC ZONES (NEZs)

A key element in Vietnam’s post-1975 planning was the expansion of the New Economic Zone scheme. As previously detailed in Chapter 3, the program’s primary goals were to assist with the deurbanisation of Vietnam’s cities and promote agricultural production, with secondary objectives of increasing productive employment opportunities in the rural areas. Desbarats (1990a:197) argues that military strategy and political control were equally as important as the demographic and economic considerations. For example, the establishment of New Economic Zones (NEZs) along the Cambodian, Laotian and Chinese borders had explicit strategic design, and political control was established by the relocation of persons loyal to the new regime to sensitive areas, especially in the Central Highlands where they could help contain anti-government resistance.\(^\text{16}\) In addition, there was the expulsion of “undesirable elements” of the population—including members of the former South Vietnam military and

\(^{16}\) This policy remained active until about 1984.
administration, ethnic minorities, and the poor—from urban to rural areas (Desbarats, 1987a:197; 1990b:56).

The government used a mixture of incentives and disincentives, and even threats, to persuade people to move to the NEZs. Incentives initially included giving volunteers the choice of NEZ, providing free transportation and free supplies, while the major disincentives were the lack of job opportunities in the cities and the reduced urban food ration. Desbarats (1990b:57) argued that an additional disincentive designed to strike at the core of the Vietnamese value system was educational restrictions for children whose parents chose to remain in urban areas.

The slow rate of deurbanisation in 1976 led the government to designate whole groups for relocation, including:

1. those who do not have a job and are in economic difficulty;
2. those who, though employed, are in temporary difficulty and have no assurance for the future;
3. families of government and army members having undergone or now undergoing reeducation and who are in difficulty;
4. those who have the production means and equipment. (Desbarats, 1990a:198)

By 1978, the government increased the use of coercion, and forced many people to transfer to the countryside, with many urban dwellers simply expelled to the countryside and their property confiscated. Wain (1981:40) found that the families of many reeducatees were coerced to relocate. Some moved because of threats against relatives imprisoned in the reeducation camps, while others were enticed to the NEZs upon assurances that the move would ensure that relatives in the reeducation camps would be released sooner. However, such promises were rarely fulfilled. For example, the parents of Hai tram hai were threatened by the local security authorities that unless the family relocated to a New Economic Zone, the family’s two eldest sons would never be released from the reeducation camps. After a short time in the NEZ the family realised that relocation to the NEZ would not hasten the release of the two brothers.
Conditions in most NEZs were extremely harsh, as described previously. Wain (1981:40) stated that, for some of those resettled, “trying to scratch out an existence in a New Economic Zone was no different from doing time in a reeducation camp”. Many new farmers were from urban backgrounds with little or no agricultural experience, and not used to the harsh rural conditions. The difficulties in the NEZs were recited by a number of refugees interviewed, including Nam, a young male respondent, who told how he and his family had been sent to a New Economic Zone in August 1975, because his father—who was killed during the war—had been an ARVN officer. The family’s house and property in Saigon were confiscated by the communist government, and the family was forced to move to a NEZ about 300 kilometres north of Saigon. The respondent described the conditions in the NEZ as being very harsh and difficult, especially for a young family with no farming experience, and without any adult males to do the labour. He stated that when the family arrived at the NEZ, there was nothing there. He commented:

The land was very wild. We had no house. There were only bamboo trees and grasses there. We must do all the work to clear the land and to build up the base of the house so it was higher than the surrounding land. There was only my mother and older brothers and sisters and it took about five months to clear the land.

The family was allotted a parcel of land approximately 400 metres long by 36 metres wide, on which the family grew rice and bananas. Nam told how he also caught fish, crabs and shrimp in the fields to supplement the family’s diet.

A similar story was told by Ba muoi ba, a 42 year old former member of the ARVN. He stated that he was forced to live in a NEZ for two years, and that “conditions were difficult in the NEZ”. He contended that because he was a newcomer to farming and had to work by himself, “there was not enough food or rice for eating”. He added that the communist government did not provide enough food or resources.

17 There were a number of showcase NEZs, mostly around Saigon, such as Le Minh Xuan (which was formally a South Vietnamese model cooperative).
Diseases—especially malaria—were rampant in the NEZs according to Mot tram bay. This youthful and articulate refugee commented that health facilities in the NEZs were very bad, and he estimated that fifteen per cent of all deaths in his area were the result of this mosquito-borne disease.

The resettlement of persons to New Economic Zones was not confined to those living in the former South Vietnam. In 1980, Sau, a 64 year old man and his family from Cham Pha in northern Vietnam, had their house confiscated and were forced to a NEZ because his eldest son escaped from Vietnam.

The field study revealed that at least seventeen respondents had been relocated to NEZs, and all spoke of the difficulties involved in farming these areas. Most respondents left and returned—illegally—to their town or city of origin, especially Ho Chi Minh City, after only a few years. Only two respondents said that they remained in the NEZs for more than ten years. Typical of those who returned was Tam muoi mot, a thirty-five year old male, who stated that his family was removed from Dong Nai to a NEZ in 1978. He described life in the NEZ:

Family life there was very bad. One of my sisters got sick and died, and another escaped and went to another town. We could not continue to live in that area, so I took my father, mother and sister back to where we lived before. The family did not have a family book, so we lived in the area illegally and everything I did was illegal. Because I lived there illegally, the local authorities imprisoned me in a reeducation camp for one year of hard labour.

**ETHNIC PERSECUTION**

Many of the seven million members of Vietnam’s fifty-six official ethnic minority groups were subjected to severe persecution by the revolutionary Vietnamese

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18 Chapter 2 contains a discussion of population movements from the North. See Figure 2.3 for North–North and South–South movements and Figure 2.4 for North–South movements between 1976 and 1980.
government in the post-1975 period, as previously detailed in Chapter 2. Hanoi repressed those ethnic minorities who attempted to maintain traditional ways of life and resist assimilation, with many groups forced to chose between betraying their cultural heritage or moving from their homeland in order to preserve their cultural identity. It is estimated that 1.5 million Montagnards were forced to relocate from their traditional highlands to designated lowland areas as part of Hanoi’s resettlement program. Other ethnic minorities, such as those southern Vietnamese of Indian, Cambodian or Chinese extraction, were also targeted by the government, and received limited educational and employment opportunities. Many were pressured to relocate to the New Economic Zones or else leave the country (Aurora Foundation, 1989:87).

There is a history of animosity from sections of the ethnic Vietnamese population towards persons of Chinese descent who had traditionally been members of the capitalist class, and frequently trade merchants. The communists considered the Chinese traders as “abettors of the U.S. war effort and as opportunists who had sold out for personal gain”, and had consequently been targeted by the new regime (Aurora Foundation, 1989:88). Economic measures introduced in early 1978 severely affected the Chinese traders and government persecution of the Hoa peaked. Many of the ethnic Chinese were given the ultimatum of moving to a New Economic Zone or leaving the country. Hundreds of thousands chose the latter in the mass exodus of refugees out of Vietnam (discussed extensively in Chapter 3).

Another minority group subjected to persecution and discrimination, both prior to and following the fall of South Vietnam, was the Amerasian (con lai or My lai) population. After reunification, the small Amerasian minority were observed by many Vietnamese as a constant reminder of the American involvement in Vietnam during the war, and consequently suffered various forms of discrimination, such as the right to

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19 Bannister (1993) estimated that the ethnic minority population was 6.7 million in 1979. She also calculated that 483,000 ethnic Chinese left Vietnam in 1978 and 1979. This means the ethnic population was probably slightly more than seven million people at the fall of Saigon.

20 Amerasians are children fathered by American (My) servicemen during the war.
education. Amerasian children, and their families, were given special status within the Orderly Departure Program, so that few were evident in the normal refugee stream after 1988. 21

RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION

Although religious freedom is guaranteed in Article 68 of the Vietnamese Constitution, the communist regime waged a strong anti-religion campaign with widespread religious oppression. All forms of religious activity required government approval and religious leaders were constantly pressured to promote government policies. Religious social organizations were banned and non-secular social welfare institutions such as schools, hospitals and orphanages were transferred to the state (Aurora Foundation, 1989; Marr, 1987:3). Thousands of temples, pagodas and other places of worship were destroyed by the communists throughout the country (Nhan Dan cited in Desbarats, 1990b:49).

The number of Buddhist monks declined dramatically after 1975, from about thirty thousand to perhaps ten thousand. Many who had joined the monkhood to avoid military conscription returned to lay life, while the government pressured many clergy to take up “productive” occupations, and forced many temples to reduce the number of monks or nuns in residence (Aurora Foundation, 1989:91; Marr, 1987:3). Furthermore, the government arrested clergy considered “reactionary” and imprisoned them in gaols or reeducation camps. Sagan (1989:2) estimated that more than 2,000 Buddhist, Catholic and Protestant religious leaders were sent to reeducation camps. According to Desbarats (1990b:50), between eighty and one hundred Catholic priests and nuns were still being held in prisons and reeducation camps in 1990, with many other Catholic leaders under house arrest.

FAMILY DISCRIMINATION

There was widespread belief among the Vietnamese population that persons sent for reeducation would soon be returned to society. However, Nguyen (1983:194) claimed that this was "a deliberate propaganda myth". He claimed that the communists had not only written off the entire former governing class of South Vietnam, but also their children. This view is supported by the Aurora Foundation (1989:62), which claimed "discriminatory measures" were not only directed against those charged with "political crimes", but also against their respective families. The families were discriminated against in employment and suffered reduced access to health care and higher education.

The 1994 field study questioned respondents about conditions in Vietnam before their escape, and asked specifically about education, employment, food, health and housing. Almost a quarter of all respondents (24.1% or 26 persons) claimed they were discriminated against because they, or their fathers or husbands, had previously served in the ARVN. Another four respondents stated they suffered because family members had worked for the former South Vietnam government, while two others claimed the government discriminated against them because their parents had previously worked for the French in Vietnam.

THE FAMILY BOOK

A key document in the lives of the Vietnamese was the family book—a document containing the names, ages, ethnicity and religions of all persons living in a household, and providing the legal status for a person, or persons, to live in a particular area. Without a current entry in the family book a person was deemed to be living in an area illegally and had to evade or bribe the local authorities. This was the situation for thousands of people who returned to the towns and cities from the NEZs without permission.
The family book was also important in other aspects of Vietnamese life. It was necessary to gain public employment and to send children to local schools. The book also entitled families to obtain certain food rations. Without a family book, a person had to obtain food from the higher-priced “black market”.

**FOOD AVAILABILITY**

The rationing of food among the Vietnamese population—which households got what, how much and at what price—was determined by the Communist Party (*Dang Cong San Viet Nam*) according to social class. According to Nguyen (1981:104), Party leaders received highest priority, with government managers second and the “collective masters” last. Only Party members, cadres and government employees were permitted to purchase goods at government stores. However, even the ration allocation to a low-level cadre was inadequate, and they were forced to purchase necessities on the black market.

Only fourteen respondents—all government employees issued with food cards—stated that they obtained goods from the government cooperative stores. *Bay muoi ba*, a forty-five year old male who was married with four children, commented:

> Because I was an employee of a government agency, I could buy food from a government store. But the store only supplied us with a small amount of food—one kilogram of meat, twenty-one kilograms of rice, one kilogram of sugar and one bottle of fish sauce each month—so I had to purchase extra from the market. We were also entitled to five metres of cloth each year.

Another respondent stated that even though his family were permitted to shop at the cooperative store, they preferred to pay the higher prices at the black market, because the government store sold meat that was rotten and vegetables that were not fresh. The remaining ninety-four respondents all bought their food on the black market.
EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES IN VIETNAM

Educational opportunities not only varied according to social status, but also over time and space. Students were divided into seven categories according to their social and family backgrounds, and the communist administration discriminated against students from certain sections of the Vietnamese population. For example, there were different pass-marks in university and technical high schools entrance examinations for different sections of the population, with lower entrance requirements in the higher groups e.g. sixteen points out of thirty was sufficient to pass in categories I and II, whereas category III students required 25.5 points. The pass requirements for the lowest categories was set so high that it made it virtually impossible for students to pass (Desbarats, 1990b:48).

When questioned about education opportunities in Vietnam, twenty respondents stated that they—or their children—were not allowed to enrol in school because of the family’s background. Another four persons stated that they had difficulty in enrolling and five other respondents stated that they had to enrol in private schools. Two respondents confirmed that access to education was difficult if there was no family book.

Access to tertiary education was denied to eleven persons after they had completed secondary school. For example, the twenty-six year old former student Hai tram mot told how he had been very successful in secondary school, and he displayed newspaper clippings of him after winning a national mathematics competition. He remonstrated that he had not been permitted to enter university, despite having better grades than the children of communist cadres who were granted enter. Hai tram mot argued he was discriminated against because his two elder brothers had previously been members of the ARVN, who had subsequently been imprisoned in reeducation camps.

The highest of the seven categories—I and II—were allotted to Party cadres and soldiers and their children, while category III was for the children of ordinary people. Categories VI and VII were assigned to the children of South Vietnam military officers and officials of the former South Vietnam administration.
Discrimination in educational opportunities because of the family’s background was mentioned by ten respondents—either because they were ethnic Chinese (five persons) or their father was formerly an ARVN soldier (five persons). *Ba muoi tam*, a middle aged ethnic Chinese woman, stated that:

The communists didn’t allow people to open Chinese classes, so my children could not go to school. I wanted to improve my children’s Chinese language by hiring a private teacher for tuition, but the government found out and wanted to arrest the teacher and me. In Vietnamese language classes, my children were excellent, very clever, but they could not have a scholarship. And I must pay higher taxes for them.

Another three respondents stated that they had to pay higher taxes than the children of communists, including one former student who stated that his family had to pay 500 *piasters*\(^{23}\) per month for him to attend school, while the “students of communists” paid a much lower fee. He added that he was frequently reminded that he was the child of a former ARVN soldier, and thus had a bad reputation with the communist government. Some former students also stated that they had restricted borrowing privileges from the school library and that they could only borrow books on certain topics, whereas the children of local communists could borrow anything.

The communist government frequently took retaliatory action against families remaining in Vietnam after a family member escaped from the country. Expulsion from school was a frequent retaliatory measure, and this occurred to five respondents in the field study.

There were eight respondents who said they did not complete secondary school, generally because they sought employment to contribute to the family’s dire financial situation. There were also thirty-three persons who claimed they had no problems with Vietnam’s education system, while eleven persons declined to comment.

\(^{23}\) The *piaster* was the former currency of South Vietnam.
EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES IN VIETNAM

Vietnam was a country in an extremely impoverished state when the civil war finally ended in 1975, as discussed previously in Chapter 3. The employment situation was succinctly summarised by one respondent: "Because industrial factories did not develop in Vietnam, there were lots of people unemployed."

The 1994 field survey questioned all respondents about the employment situation in Vietnam before their escape. Almost half of all respondents (49.0% or 53 persons) stated that it was very difficult to obtain employment in post-war Vietnam, with many people ineligible for public jobs, either because they (or their father) had been in the ARVN, or because they were ethnic Chinese.24 With limited public employment opportunities, nineteen respondents claimed they could only work in private enterprise, either for themselves as vendors or in small businesses, or for a private company.

In contrast, ten persons—all from northern Vietnam—stated they had no difficulties obtaining employment. There were, however, some respondents from the North who found it hard to obtain employment, such as Bay muoi bon, a forty-five year old male from Hai Phong. He stated that it was difficult for him to find a job following his retirement from the communist army in 1977, after eleven years service. The demobilisation of soldiers from Vietnam’s army has seen tens of thousands of men looking for employment, especially in the cities. Even in 1999, the streets of Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City are teeming with khaki-dressed men who have flocked to the cities in search of employment after completing their military service.

24 Although there was widespread discrimination against former ARVN members and the ethnic Chinese, this was not universal. Some individuals continued working for the government after 1975, such as teachers, public servants, translators, etc.
**HOUSING CONDITIONS IN VIETNAM**

Over one-quarter of all respondents (25.9% or 28 persons) stated that their homes and property had been confiscated and allocated to party cadres. Some families were forced to move to NEZs, while others resisted this relocation and lived illegally in the cities. Many persons lived with other family members, particularly parents or grandparents, after their houses were confiscated, while others had to make do with what they could find. One of the least fortunate was Muoi, a twenty year old male, who said that his family’s house was confiscated in 1989 after his father was arrested. He told how his mother, two younger brothers and himself had nowhere to live and were forced to just “wander around”. Others were only slightly more fortunate, such as Ba muoi, a forty-six year old former soldier, who lived in a tent with his wife and two children. Three other respondents said that they had to live in small houses made of bamboo and banana leaves.\(^{25}\)

The communists confiscated the property of former capitalists, including those belonging to six respondents. For example, a cinema and two houses owned by Chin muoi mot’s father were confiscated and the family was forced to move to a NEZ. One of the refugees, Hai muoi nam, stated “the communists hate the rich and the landlords because they thought that the rich oppress the poor”.

**HEALTH FACILITIES IN VIETNAM**

Large numbers of the Vietnamese population had difficulty accessing health facilities in post-war Vietnam.\(^{26}\) Nguyen (1981:94) argued this was because the country consisted of a three-tiered society that differentiated access to health facilities depending on which group a person belonged to. At the top level were Communist Party members

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\(^{25}\) Some commentators (Coughlan, Personal communication, 1996) argued that homelessness was less of a problem in Vietnam after 1975 than it was in the decade before.

\(^{26}\) There were many problems with the health care system in South Vietnam prior to 1975. Between 1965 and 1975 most of the medicine went to the armed forces, so that public hospitals had relatively little medicine and poor facilities. See Terry (1966) for a description of a well-equipped rural hospital in Long Xuyen, An Giang Province.
and cadres, an elite class who were entitled to free medicine and specialised medical treatment. The middle class was those workers and officials of the government that did not belong to the Party. They also received free medicine, but received a lower level of hospitalisation than the elite. The last group was the public or the people—all persons not working for the government system—who received only limited free pharmaceuticals and generally had to pay for medicines. If an ordinary citizen required hospitalisation, they first had to go through the local ward clinic, then the district health room, before being permitted to enter a city or specialised hospital.

A number of refugees interviewed claimed that only government employees had the right to enter hospital. They also argued that there was a fourth class in Vietnamese society—those persons without a family book—who were not allowed access to any government medical facilities. Many respondents without family books claimed that they had to seek private medical attention, even though private doctors were prohibited from practicing their profession. Among the twenty respondents who claimed that they had not been permitted to enter public hospitals, was Mot—a thirty-four year old ethnic Chinese from Saigon—who stated that he had difficulty going to a public hospital because he had no household registration. During the interview Mot became quite distressed as he told how his brother died because he was refused medical treatment. A further thirty-one persons stated they had to see a private doctor if they were sick.

A detailed personal account of problems associated with the Vietnamese health system was told by Muoi chin, a forty-seven year old former soldier. He said:

On 28 April 1975 I was wounded. At that time I stayed in hospital for the wound to be treated. On 30 April 1975 the communists arrived, and they did not allow me to stay in hospital and expelled me from the hospital—even though I still had a serious wound. So I must go home and see a private doctor. ... At that time I was not allowed to rest at home like normal people. They want to oppress me. In 1978 I saw that a piece of shrapnel was still in my arm, so I wanted to have it operated on. But the Communist government did not allow me to be treated in hospital. So I suffered for ten years with the problem with my arm. In 1982 my wife was sick, but she was not allowed to go to hospital. Later she became seriously ill, so she tried to enter the emergency room on two
occasions. When she felt better they forced her to go home. They said we had no rights to be treated in hospital.

A number of respondents who were permitted to enter public hospitals commented that the health care system in Vietnam was bad. One respondent said that although he was allowed to enter the public hospital, the doctors did not give patients any medicine, and they had to purchase drugs at a private drug store. Another seven respondents stated that they had to buy medicines at a private pharmacy, or on the black market.

Many rural areas, especially the NEZs, were without any medical facilities or personnel, as four persons testified during interviews. Nam muoi ba, a seventy-two year old woman, stated that there was no doctor or nurse in her NEZ, and that they had to pick leaves to treat illnesses. At another NEZ, Chin muoi mot’s father was blinded and needed treatment but was refused permission to go to a hospital in another district.

Only seventeen persons interviewed (15.7%) stated that they were allowed to enter public hospitals, although some of these said they had to pay. There were also seven respondents who did not comment on Vietnam’s health system because they claimed they had never been sick and sought treatment.

This preceding description has shown that conditions in Vietnam were very austere for a significant section of the country’s population, especially those formerly associated with the South Vietnamese regime, or the ethnic minorities. In addition, the families of former government officials and military officers were also targeted for discrimination by the communist regime. The communist regime’s appalling treatment of this population was a significant factor in why large numbers of people decided to escape the country, as will be illustrated below.
THE DECISION TO FLEE

A person's decision to flee their country and seek asylum in a foreign land is a very traumatic experience. It is generally considered that this decision is made only after conditions in the home country have become intolerable, and flight is regarded as the only acceptable option. In Truong's (1985:293) opinion, "escape was truly a decision that could only be made out of desperation". Baker (1983:5) argued that the decision to flee was "a high point of tension and marks the beginning of the refugee experience proper".

Bulcha (1988:99) found that "the immediate events and circumstances which influence the decision to leave tend to be very complex". This assumption is supported by evidence obtained during the RRMC field study, which questioned each respondent on why they had escaped from Vietnam. Respondents furnished a wide variety of responses on why they had fled, and there were frequently a complex combination of factors involved that had evolved over a prolonged period of time. In a small number of cases, the decision was a sudden decision forced upon respondents by events at the time, while the majority of decisions were carefully deliberated over time.

It is important to reiterate at this point that there is no such thing as a typical refugee experience. The migration of every refugee is a unique event forged by different factors in the country of origin, first asylum and resettlement, and every refugee underwent different experiences in each of these environments. Consequently, it is necessary to examine a broad spectrum of reasons why Vietnamese refugees fled their country.

Respondents' explanations on why they fled Vietnam have been loosely grouped into topics to assist the discussion (Table 5.1). It should be emphasised that the topics selected are not mutually-exclusive, and that there is considerable overlap between groups. It is also important to stress that in many instances, there was more than one factor involved in the decision to leave. In such cases, a single reason for escaping has been selected based on the respondent's dialogue.
The study found that more than forty per cent of the respondents (42.6% or 46 persons) escaped from Vietnam because they had been discriminated against by the communist government for having "bad family backgrounds"—because a family member had formerly been in the military, a capitalist, a landlord, or in a small number of cases, because their fathers or grandfathers had worked for the French, or the family was ethnic Chinese or Catholic (Table 5.1). The general theme expressed by refugees in the interviews was that they had been discriminated against and persecuted in Vietnam, and fled the country because they could no longer suffer the cruel rule of the communist regime.

Table 5.1
Reasons for Escaping from Vietnam

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons for leaving</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discrimination:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Former South Vietnam military</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>21.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic discrimination</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious persecution</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unspecified discrimination</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imprisonment</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideological</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government policies</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family reunion</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retaliation for family escaping</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other reasons</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>108</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field study, 1994

Respondents, when questioned why they had escaped from Vietnam, consistently emphasised the discrimination and persecution they had suffered at the hands of the Vietnamese government. While it is understandable that refugees would express this view, it is the researcher's opinion that the extremely strong emphasis placed on discrimination and persecution may—in part—be the result of the arduous refugee screening procedure that all respondents had undergone, and which is discussed...
in more detail in Chapter 6. The central component of the screening process in the first asylum camps was the United Nations' definition of a refugee. To obtain refugee status, asylum-seekers had to establish that they had been subjected to discrimination and persecution in Vietnam, and fulfilled the criteria in the U.N. definition. This process advanced respondents' knowledge of the legal and refugee vocabulary.

**FORMER MEMBERS OF SOUTH VIETNAM MILITARY**

The most frequent response offered by respondents as their reason for escaping Vietnam was that the communist government had discriminated against the family because they, or their father or husband, had been a soldier in the ARVN before 1975. Twenty-three respondents (21.3%) gave this response: nine men who had previously been ARVN soldiers, thirteen children of military personnel, and one woman who was the wife of a former South Vietnamese soldier.

Among this group were three former soldiers who had been imprisoned in reeducation camps, and a fourth who attended three days of reeducation, who all escaped because of the communists' retribution against them. This included Bon muoi tam who was imprisoned for two years in a reeducation camp and, upon his release, was forced by the government to move to a NEZ.

The communist authorities maintained close surveillance over former soldiers and their families. Some respondents told how they were required to regularly report to the police, and obtain permission when they wanted to leave their local area. The father of Tam muoi hai spent three years in reeducation camps because he was a former ARVN officer. Because of this, his family was not permitted to go out of the local area. Hai muoi bay claimed that he was always "looked over by the communist government" and

27 The definition of a refugee under the 1951 United Nations Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees is a person who "owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country" (UNHCR, 1979).
that he must always ask permission from police when he wanted to go anywhere or do anything. He concluded “I had no freedom there, and decided to escape because I wanted to go to a free nation.”

The families of many imprisoned ARVN servicemen were also frequently persecuted by the communist regime, especially with restricted access to education and employment. *Hai muoi hai*, a twenty-three year old Vietnamese male, claimed he was discriminated against because of his father’s military background. He stated:

My family had no family book because my father was previously an officer in ARVN before 1975. This affected my family and me. I could not suffer the discrimination in school any longer, so I decided to escape. In school there was discrimination between the children of communists and children of [ARVN] soldiers. I was not allowed to borrow books from the library and must also pay higher maintenance taxes. The children of communists did not pay, and they were allowed to borrow books. I was not allowed to join in the activities in class, such as playing football or table tennis. I was not equal.

The restriction in educational opportunities was widespread among former ARVN families, such as *Muoi bon*, who claimed that his brother was forced to drop his university studies and two other brothers and himself were expelled from school because his father had been an ARVN soldier. There was also *Mot tram*, a twenty-six year old Vietnamese male from Hue, who stated:

I escaped because my father was a soldier in ARVN before 1975. After 1975 the communists considered us a bad element, so it was difficult for my siblings and me to go to school. We only studied until ninth grade. If we wanted to study more we have to study in private school, helped by a private teacher. …Many times I tried to escape … but I did not succeed. Later the local authorities realised that my family was intending to escape, so they always watched us.

Families of former soldiers were frequently forced to move to New Economic Zones. Among them was twenty-eight year old *Bon muoi ba*, who declared that his father had previously been a major in the ARVN.
He was put into reeducation camp for nearly ten years. After that his house and property were confiscated by the government and the family were forced to a NEZ. There I could not enrol in school because of my family background. My mother was paralysed and not allowed to enter public hospital, so she must be treated by a private doctor. So I decided to escape.

Other families, including that of Sau muoi tam, were forcibly relocated to NEZs, but soon returned to urban life. She claimed:

My father was a former soldier of the ARVN, and we were forced to move to a New Economic Zone. Life in the NEZ was very harsh, so we have to escape—to return to the place where I was born. I had to peddle goods to support the family, and I was arrested twice for peddling. If I was arrested a third time for peddling I would have been placed in gaol, so I decided to escape.

In 1976, Mot tram bay was forced to move to a NEZ in Pleiku because his parents had been in the ARVN, and he lived there until his escape in 1989. He told how his life in the NEZ was very miserable, lacking everything. When I want to find a job, I could not. Those people living in the NEZs were concentrated into areas by the communists, because they were related to the former regime. So the discipline in the NEZ was strict. We have no freedom, and at night we are not allowed to go out after nine o’clock. I thought about my future and the life and the activity, and that was my decision for leaving.

Many respondents also claimed that they could not get a job because of their father’s background. For example, Hai muoi mot, declared that “when the communists occupied South Vietnam, my family were revenged by the communist government. So I have no criterion to apply for education or a job.”

It is evident from the information obtained from respondents that the communist regime initiated a widespread campaign to discriminate against former ARVN military personnel and their families. Former soldiers were subjected to imprisonment and reeducation, and they, and their families, were discriminated against in education and employment opportunities. Many respondents were forced to relocate to the New Economic Zones, where they suffered enormous hardships.
ETHNIC DISCRIMINATION

The Vietnam government’s persecution of ethnic minority groups has been a major source of refugee flight since 1975. The ethnic Chinese in particular, suffered extreme discrimination including the confiscation of businesses and property, dismissal from government employment, and restriction in education. Some were forced to relocate to other areas of the country, while others were coerced to leave Vietnam. This oppression was confirmed in the interviews conducted at RRTC in 1994.

The field survey interviewed nineteen ethnic Chinese respondents, and nine of these directly stated that they left Vietnam because of ethnic discrimination. Among these was Chin muoi bay, a forty-seven year old ethnic Chinese man who had previously lived in Ha Tuyen province in northern Vietnam. He eloquently discussed the plight of the ethnic Chinese in Vietnam:

In 1978 the communist government wanted to get rid of the Chinese out of the country, so they discriminated against them and many decided to escape. Since that time we have been thinking about escape. At that time the communists give us good propaganda, like “You are Vietnamese/Chinese, you can return to your home country or you can live in Vietnam.” But after an agreement between the Vietnamese and Chinese governments, all of the Chinese who were assisting Vietnam were forced into a concentrated territory. Concentrated territory—communist government want to make a Chinese country there, and isolate them from society. In 1978 I had thought about escaping, but it did not succeed. In 1978 the communists wanted to get rid of Viet hoa out of the country, so they discriminated against us. But after 1979 we could not all get out of the country. Our house and property were confiscated and we were forced to concentrated territory. We live there without property, and life was miserable. We were put on probation by the communists, so we thought we could not last, so we escaped. From 1979–1990 we lived in a concentrated territory. In 1990, because of the many pressures put on the Viet hoa, so we decided to return to our ancestor’s motherland. At the end of 1990 I succeeded in escaping.

The other five ethnic Chinese respondents who mentioned racial discrimination all stated that they could not apply for a job or enter university. Typical of this group was Tam muoi chin, a fifty-eight year old ethnic Chinese male from Quang Ninh in northern Vietnam, who stated:
Before 1975 I worked for the government, but afterwards I had to find work for myself. In 1979 I got into problems because of the policies of communist government about Viet hoa, when the communists force us to leave the country and they confiscated my house. ... I was considered a bad element. I could not get a normal life as other citizens. When I need the signature of the local authority, they wrote I was a bad element of society. It was difficult for my children to enter university or college because I am Chinese/Vietnamese. The communists discriminated against us. They were always thinking something bad about me, so I cannot lead a normal life.

Another three ethnic Chinese respondents merely stated that they left Vietnam because they were discriminated against, although they did not mention racial discrimination. A Chinese woman said that she escaped because of her family background and “because I had no way of living in Vietnam. I could not go to school, look for a job, have no house for living, because of my family background.” These reasons correspond with other respondents who were discriminated against because they were Chinese. Another Chinese respondent, Chin muoi tam, told how she did not like the communist regime, because they had “unfair behaviour with the people”. The third ethnic Chinese person stated he could not live in Vietnam because of the presence of the communists. He had earlier told how his family had been arrested and his father had died after being tortured in gaol.

**Religious Persecution**

Government persecution of Catholics forced three respondents to flee Vietnam, including Muoi ba, a twenty-one year old woman from Dong Nai district near Ho Chi Minh City. She stated:

My father was a member of a parish of the Catholic church, and he and four other men looked after the church. The government wanted to terrorise the Catholic church, they wanted to destroy the church, but my father wanted to protect the church. The police assaulted all of them. My father’s teeth were broken, and my father ran away to Bien Tri. The other four men were arrested by the police. Afterwards the authorities caught my mother and us children and asked her where my father was. They beat my mother a lot. All of this happened in one month. The police saw that they could not have no result. My mother cannot suffer
any more with the cruel regime of the communists, so we decided to escape.

_Tam muoi bon_, a thirty-three year old man from the northern Vietnamese coastal city of Hai Phong, alleged that:

Since 1958 to 1989 communists have discriminated against my family, but I never had any desire to escape. During that time my father was arrested many times and tortured. My older sister escaped from Vietnam because her husband was Chinese. My brother was a seminarian in Catholic church and was arrested. We have not heard any information from him since. Only persecution from the communists. I could not suffer any more. I thought I should leave. In June 1988 the Vatican decided to “promote” 117 Vietnamese people who had died for religion. But the communists did not allow the Catholic ceremony. I thought we had freedom in religion, so why could we not conduct the ceremony. Finally, I did the ceremony. I made a sculpture for the church and the communists told me I was not allowed to do this, and that if I did this I would be punished. I told them not to combine politics and religion—they are different. And I wanted to do this. I decided to help the church to conduct the ceremony. I was not afraid of the communist treatment. Although we secretly conducted the ceremony, the communists still knew about it, and they caught me and imprisoned me. And they wanted me to make a claim about the ceremony organisers, but I did not want to make this claim, so I had to escape from gaol. I escaped from gaol to Lang Son in December 1988 and lived there until May 1989. The middle seminarian from Hai Phong church informed me that the communist government was still chasing me, so I should not go back to Hai Phong. So I have no choice, the only option is to escape from Vietnam.

The third respondent to claim religious persecution was _Nam muoi sau_, an elderly Vietnamese man who worked for a chaplain in Hanoi. He claimed to have been expelled and discriminated against in society under communist government rule. He left Vietnam because:

During that time, the Pope in Rome wanted to memorise [canonise] thirty-two persons who were martyred for religion. The communist government told me to report to police, and try to force me to sign a letter protesting to the Pope. I did not sign it because I belong to the Catholic religion. They detained me for reeducation, so I feared that I would be imprisoned for two or three years, so I decided to escape.
An additional eleven respondents stated that they fled Vietnam because they were discriminated against by the communist government, although they did not express any details apart from bad family backgrounds. Included among these was Tam, a twenty-nine year old Vietnamese woman from Phu Yen, who stated that her family were persecuted by the communist government and discriminated against in society because of her bad family background. She said that her name was erased from the family book and she was not allowed to work for the government. She also claimed to have been arrested and imprisoned for three months and then forced to do National Defence Labour.  

Government discrimination against capitalists was mentioned by three respondents, who claimed that their families suffered because their parents or grandparents had been capitalists or landlords. For example, thirty-seven year old Hai muoi nam’s hairdressing shop in Hanoi was closed down. She believed that she was discriminated against because her grandfather had been a landlord in 1954. Another northerner, thirty-year old Ba muoi nam, also claimed his grandfather had been a landlord, and stated that when the communists found out about his background his family was discriminated against in society and he was “not treated as an equal like others”. The family of Chin muoi ba—an ethnic Chinese—had operated a small plastics company in Ho Chi Minh City. The communists considered his family “an element of capitalism”, so confiscated their property, imprisoned his father and forced the family to a NEZ. He was later imprisoned, where he was forced to do labour, and upon his release he was placed on probation. Chin muoi ba decided to escape because he could not live under the communist regime.

Nam muoi nam was a forty-eight year old woman from Van Gia in southern Vietnam, who stated that she had been discriminated against in society, firstly because

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28 National Defence Labour was a conscripted national service in lieu of military service.
her father had been a landlord, and secondly because her husband and two older brothers had been former soldiers who were later condemned to death. She had also been arrested by the police and imprisoned for one year, where she was severely beaten.

Some people stated that they escaped because they were discriminated against, but did not provide full details of what occurred. For example, Nam muoi chin, a twenty-six year old male from Hai Phong, only stated that he was expelled from school and was discriminated against by the police. He also claimed that after he married, the police became suspicious of his wife and he was required to report to the police daily. He feared that he would be arrested, so he decided to escape.

Tam muoi sau, a thirty-seven year old man from Nha Trang on the southern coast, stated that he left because he could not suffer the situation in Vietnam. He explained how the government imprisoned his father, searched their house and confiscated all their jewellery and possessions. He commented that they had a bad family background, because his father was a former professor before 1975, and consequently had no family book.

An articulate, former teacher from Da Nang—Tam muoi tam—declared that she left Vietnam because they were persecuted and could not have “normal facilities like other citizens”. She had previously explained that her father had been an employee of the South Vietnam government, and that her mother had worked for an American company—strong grounds for discrimination by the communist authorities.

Another respondent—thirty-three year old Chin muoi—claimed that his family was considered a bad element of society because they belonged to a special political group and because his parents had worked for the South Vietnam government before 1975. He claimed that his family was on the bottom level in Vietnamese society—for those families who had parents in the ARVN or worked for the South Vietnamese government—and therefore discriminated against by society.

Even former North Vietnamese soldiers like forty-seven year old Bay muoi bon—who served in South Vietnam between 1969 and 1977—claimed oppression. He
simply stated that “like all refugees, we were persecuted and we cannot suffer any more. It was a decision between death and leaving”.

**IMPRISONMENT**

Field study investigations revealed that almost one in eight respondents (13.0% or 14 persons) decided to escape from Vietnam because they had previously been imprisoned by the Vietnamese government, and many of these sought to live in a “freedom country”. There was considerable variation among respondents about the reasons for imprisonment. For example, *Muoi mot* was a forty-four year old former teacher from Da Nang, who had been expelled from teaching because he was the son of a former ARVN soldier. He stated that he had wanted to change his name and date of birth to cover his bad family background, but the communists discovered this, and he was arrested and imprisoned for two years. He attempted to escape in 1981, but the authorities found out and arrested him and gaol ed him again for six months. He attempted to escape a further six times before he was successful in 1991.

*Chin*—a thirty-eight year old ethnic Chinese man—was gaol ed by local authorities in 1988. He stated that his father and his brother—former ARVN soldiers—had both died in prison as a result of being beaten. During his detention in a labour camp, *Chin* witnessed the killing of a political prisoner by two cadres, who subsequently accused him of the murder. He decided he must escape from prison or else he would have been wrongfully punished.

Another respondent who spent time in prison was *Tam muoi bay*, a thirty-seven year old man, who claimed:

I could not lead a normal life in Vietnam. The communist government always considered my family and me a bad family in society. They discriminated against my family and me. I escaped from the NEZ in 1976 … but was arrested and sentenced to six years reeducation. I escaped. In 1983 I was sentenced to ten years imprisonment for escaping. I managed to escape from Vietnam in 1988.
Desertion from the army resulted in twenty-nine year old Sau muoi nam being imprisoned. He recalled the events leading to his imprisonment:

I was serving in the Vietnamese army in Cambodia for nearly two years, where I had attained the rank of sergeant. One day I was ordered to shoot a group of Cambodian villagers. I thought the villagers were innocent, so I let them go. However, a superior officer caught me releasing the people. The villagers ran away in one direction, I ran away in the other. I made my way back to Vietnam, but was arrested and imprisoned for four years. I managed to escape after I was imprisoned, when I was out on work duty. When I escaped I had nowhere to live, so lived here for some months and there for some months. Eventually my older brother’s friend helped me escape because he knew I had a difficult life in Vietnam.

Those caught attempting to escape from Vietnam were arrested and imprisoned in gaol (or occasionally in reeducation camps). This misfortune befell six respondents, including Bay muoi tam, who had first attempted to escape in 1984, but the bid failed and he was arrested and imprisoned. He claimed that:

Because I had no money for bribing the officials I spent three years in prison ... during which time I was tortured. I was first put in Dong Rang camp—a camp for those with “opposite policies” and for people who had attempted to escape. We have to work very hard in bad conditions. I contracted malaria, but was not supplied with medicine, so I decided to escape. ... For me, I had to escape [from Vietnam] because I had fled from prison.

Another two respondents stated that they were gaoled for attempting to escape after they had spoken out against government policies. One of these was Tam muoi hai, who was married to a Chinese woman and lived with their three children in Quang Ninh province in northern Vietnam. He had remonstrated to Vietnamese officials about the government policy of forcing ethnic Chinese living in Vietnam to return to China, and when he spoke out against the unfair treatment of his wife, he was imprisoned. Tam muoi hai claimed that after his release from prison the “government always made trouble” for him, so he decided to escape. However, his first attempt failed and he was arrested and gaoled for two years. He claimed that he could not suffer the difficult life
in the prison and managed to escape, then decided that he must flee the country and successfully escaped in 1989.

*Mot tram tam* was a fifty-two year old lawyer and former Communist Party member also from Quang Ninh, who claimed to have regularly witnessed “some unjust political actions against the rights of the Vietnamese people”. In 1989 he voiced his disapproval of these policies, which resulted in him being expelled from the Communist Party, both he and his wife were dismissed from their jobs, the family’s household registration and food ration card were cancelled, his house was confiscated, and his children denied education opportunities. Following the government’s retaliation against him, *Mot tram tam* unsuccessfully attempted to escape Vietnam by boat, and was arrested. In court he was sentenced to six years imprisonment. Fortunately, he escaped from prison at the end of 1990 and fled to Hong Kong.

An additional three respondents stated that they were imprisoned for having different political beliefs from those of the government. Among these was *Bay muoi chin* a thirty-five year old Bulgarian-educated teacher who was sentenced to twenty-five years imprisonment for instigating “a demonstration of a group of students for improving the life of students and the system of education”. However, he escaped from prison after two months and shortly afterwards fled from Vietnam. *Chin muoi nam* had spent six years in prison and two years in a labour camp. Whilst in the labour camp he demonstrated against the communists which led to him being arrested and tortured. He said that he could not endure the conditions in the labour camp any longer, so he escaped and his brother-in-law took him to China. Another respondent—*Chin muoi chin*—was imprisoned for assisting an ethnic Chinese who had returned to Vietnam to locate his ancestral grave after being expelled by the government in 1978.
IDELOGICAL DIFFERENCES

Most refugees opposed the ideology of the communist government. However, thirteen respondents explicitly answered that they escaped because they held different ideological beliefs. Among these was Chin muoi sau, who stated:

I did not agree with the policies of the government. The communist policies were wrong, so I criticised them ... I was arrested and tortured until I became unconscious. They took me to hospital where a doctor helped me to escape. ... After that incident I could not live under the communist government ... I thought I would be put in gaol, so I left Vietnam.

Similar stories were told by a number of other refugees, such as Hai Phong doctor Nam muoi mot, who claimed “I was terrorised by the government because I have a different idea and personal speech.” Bay muoi ba was imprisoned for six months for having “opposing political ideas to the government. I was arrested by the police and imprisoned for seven months. After that I decided to escape.”

When twenty-nine year old former university student Nam muoi bay spoke out against the communist government he was threatened by police. Fearing arrest and imprisonment, he decided to escape. Another northerner, forty-year old Bay muoi bay, claimed he had “opposite political ideas to the communist”, so had to escape—without his wife and children. The four person family of Chin muoi bon escaped because his wife had opposing political ideals to the communists.

Bay muoi hai merely stated that she did not like the communist regime, while Hai muoi tam claimed that he could not live with the communist government because his “mind and education always followed the Vietnam before 1975” and because he hated the communist government. An ethnic Chinese man, Bay muoi mot, simply stated that he fled “to seek freedom”.

COMMUNIST GOVERNMENT POLICIES

Communist government policies pressured twelve respondents to escape from Vietnam. Again, there was a very wide range of responses in this loose grouping, such
as Mot, who fled when his pregnant wife was forced by the local authorities to carry out labour duties, or Bay, who left because "the local authorities wanted to destroy my house and make trouble for me. I cannot stand the discrimination after 1975, so I decided to leave."

Nam muoi tam, claimed that he fled because the local authorities persecuted him. He stated that:

My wife and I were not allowed to live together. Our parents belonged to the Saigon regime of South Vietnam and we were considered to have a bad family background. I was always hiding from the communists. ... I was detained many times and my wife had to visit me in prison. It was very hard for her to look after the baby and earn money. The Vietnamese government was very unjust. We have been married twelve years, but have only lived together for five years—since we have been in the Philippines. In Vietnam, life was very different.

Others, such as Hai muoi nam, considered the communist policies to be unjust and did not want to live under such a regime. Tam muoi argued that the communists behaved unfairly and made it difficult for her to live in Vietnam. Ba muoi hai claimed that he was censored by the communist government and prohibited him from writing in magazines.

Police wanted to get information about the father of Ba muoi chin so they watched him and investigated his family. So Ba muoi chin decided to escape. Nam muoi bay decided to escape because he feared being arrested and imprisoned after the police threatened him. Another respondent claimed that he escaped from Vietnam because he could not live in a NEZ.

**FAMILY REUNION**

There were nine respondents—all of them female—who escaped from Vietnam so they could be reunited with family members living overseas. Muoi tam—a thirty year old nurse—was one of seven women who fled to be reunited with their husband. Muoi tam had wanted to escape with her husband when he fled to the Philippines in 1988, but because she was five months pregnant, decided to wait until after she had given birth.
She escaped with her young son in August 1989, by which time the CPA and screening procedures had been introduced.

Life in Vietnam was very difficult for twenty-one year old Sau muoi ba after her father escaped in 1983. She wanted to be reunited with him in Sydney because her family was always fighting, and life in her home in Hong Gai was “not peaceful”. Mot tram hai, a seventy-seven year old woman from Khanh Hoa province in central Vietnam, became lonely after her son escaped from Vietnam in 1982 and resettled in the United States the following year. Consequently, she decided to escape in order to be with her son. Despite a number of failed attempts, she eventually managed to escape in 1989.

**EDUCATION**

It was mentioned above that a number of respondents were discriminated against in their education endeavours in Vietnam. In addition, two other respondents stated they escaped because of the lack of education opportunities in Vietnam. Ba left Vietnam as a sixteen year old unaccompanied minor. Her mother, who organised the girl’s escape, wanted her to have a better education than that available to her in Vietnam. The failure of twenty-seven year old Sau muoi mot to gain admission to university on two or three occasions was her stated reason for escaping.

**REPRESSION AGAINST FAMILY-MEMBERS ESCAPING**

The retaliation by the government against respondents for family members escaping was mentioned by two persons as their reason for fleeing Vietnam. Nam muoi ba was a seventy-two year old ethnic Chinese woman who lived in a NEZ in southern Vietnam. She previously tried to escape three or four times, but was not successful. However, her children escaped after they were arrested by the police. She stated that

29 An unaccompanied minor was a person less than eighteen years of age, who was not accompanied by an adult relative on their escape from Vietnam.
she decided to stay in Vietnam because she was too old. After her children fled, the police raided her house many times and “made trouble” for her. They forced her to work hard, to substitute for her children. She said that she could not suffer any more, so decided to escape.

Bon muoi bon had once been held in high regard by the communist administration, spending six years studying and training in Bulgaria. While he was overseas, his sister escaped from Vietnam, and upon his return in 1989 Bon muoi bon claimed that the government did not allow him to go overseas to study again, and he could not obtain a job in the country. He claimed this was all because of his sister’s escape. Consequently, he decided to escape.

OTHER REASONS FOR ESCAPING

Not all refugee responses fitted the categories discussed above, so it was necessary to have a residual group of “other reasons” for ten explanations. Included in this group was the unusual escape of Muoi, a twenty year old male from Hai Phong. He stated that after the communist authorities confiscated the family’s house:

My younger brother and I had no house for living, so we wanted to get a job to earn money. But no one would hire us. On 2 June 1989 we were sleeping on the bank of a river. We saw a big boat and lots of people boarding the boat. So my younger brother and I tried to board the boat too ... we thought that the owner of the boat would hire us to work. We did not know the boat was leaving.

Muoi and his younger brother stayed on the boat and travelled to China and then Hong Kong. A somewhat similar tale was told by Mot tram bay:

At that time I had no intention to escape, because I did not have the money to escape. I just wanted to get out of the NEZ and get a job on the coast. A friend living near the sea helped me get a job ... I did not know about the organization until the boat I was working on left Vietnam. The crew did not know. When the boat was at sea for two days, the owner told us. Then we reached land and picked up the escapees, and then left. There were ten crewmembers, but four of them did not agree to escape, but they had to obey. But when we reached Palawan they voluntarily
repatriated back to Vietnam. With me, it was a good chance I had not encountered before.

*Tam muoi hai,* a twenty-one year old male from Khanh Hoa, escaped while undergoing National Defence Labour because of his bad family background. He stated:

One day I was assigned to look after the cattle they were raising. The cattle were eating grass near the side of the road, and a military truck hit one of the cattle and killed it. Two days after the accident an inspector came and counted the cattle, and found that one was missing. He did not believe the story about the truck, so ordered me to go home and get 1.7 million dong to compensate for the dead animal. If I did not pay the money I would be imprisoned. I went and hid at my uncle’s house while the authorities looked for me. After three days I heard about a boat that was leaving Vietnam.

*Ba muoi bon,* a twenty-six year old man, had been forced to recruit men to become soldiers in the army. However, he did not like this work, so escaped back to Ho Chi Minh City, where he lived “without permanent life”. Therefore, he decided to flee the country. *Mot tram mot,* a fifty-four year old single male, stated that he escaped because his younger brother wanted to escape, and he must accompany him to assist him, while twenty-five year old *Sau muoi chin* said she accompanied her sister escaping. Others, such as thirty-three year old *Hai muoi,* merely stated that she did not like living under a communist regime, so she escaped, while thirty year old *Bon muoi sau* escaped because she considered her future was very dark if she remained in Vietnam. *Bay muoi* merely claimed that there were problems for him and his family living in Vietnam.

**Two-Time Refugees**

Field study interviews disclosed that a small number of respondents had been refugees before, including *Muoi chin,* a forty-seven year old male, who told how his father had been a soldier for the French. When the French were defeated by the communists at Dien Bien Phu in 1954, the family moved to South Vietnam. In 1966, *Muoi chin* joined the South Vietnam Army (ARVN) and for the next nine years fought against the communist forces. Handicapped by war injuries, he suffered considerable hardships under the communist regime, so in 1983 he took his wife and six children and
attempted to escape. However, they were intercepted by the police and arrested. In 1985 his son successfully escaped to Malaysia. When the local authorities found out the son had escaped they required the father to report to the police station to explain the son’s actions. Muoi chin stated that the police beat him and “terrorised his mind”, and that he was required to report to the local police station daily. In 1989 the police wanted Muoi chin to spy for them on a group of former ARVN officers who attended a Buddhist temple for prayers. Initially he refused, as he did not want to betray his friends, but the police assaulted him and threatened him with imprisonment if he did not obey. Eventually he agreed to infiltrate the group and report on them. However, Muoi chin “could not suffer the treatment from the communists” and escaped to Hong Kong with his two brothers.

The escape from Vietnam was the third time that Bon muoi mot had become a refugee. His first experience as a refugee was in 1949, when—as a five year old boy—he escaped with his family from China after the communists overwhelmed the Chinese Nationalists. The family lived in northern Vietnam for five years, until they evacuated to the South in 1954 following the communist takeover of North Vietnam. Bon muoi mot settled in the Cam Ranh Bay region of South Vietnam, and lived there until he was ordered by the communists to move to a New Economic Zone in 1975. However, he did not obey the directive, and instead fled to Dong Nai province where he lived until his escape from Vietnam in 1990.

REPEATED ESCAPE ATTEMPTS

It is necessary to question why respondents remained in Vietnam if the conditions in the country were as bad as they described. The answer, in part, is that many respondents had attempted to flee previously, but for one reason or another, failed in their attempts. More than six out of ten respondents (61.1% or 66 persons) claimed that they had attempted to escape on more than one occasion, with one person attempting to escape sixteen times over a fifteen year period (Table 5.2). Some
respondents could not remember the exact number of times they had attempted to escape, other than it was “many times”. This included Hai muoi chin, who declared that his family had attempted to escape every year since 1978. He eventually managed to escape on his own in 1989.

Table 5.2

Number of Attempts to Escape

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of escape attempts</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>38.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>18.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 or more</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Many times”</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field study, 1994

Escape attempts frequently failed when the organisers deceived passengers. A thirty-seven year old refugee woman, Hai muoi nam, declared that her first attempt to escape from Vietnam failed because the organising group “cheated” her. She said that after she arrived at the seashore, the police discovered her group trying to escape. Fortunately, she managed to evade them and was not arrested by the police. Another respondent told how the organiser told him the wrong date when the boat was leaving. On one of Mot tram bon’s six attempts to escape the country, the boat sank shortly after it left the shore. Mot tram bon managed to swim ashore and travel back to Saigon. He commented that the other escapes had failed because of the organisers, when the authorities found out about the attempts.
Over one-quarter of respondents (28.7% or 31 persons), ranging from young teenagers to old women, had been arrested by the police for attempting to escape from Vietnam. One of these was a young respondent named Bon, who maintained that he was arrested by the police for trying to escape and incarcerated in prison for five months and in reeducation camp for seven months. Another of the respondents, Hai muoi tam, claimed that he was arrested by police seven times for attempting to escape, and that his longest gaol sentence was one year, during which time he was shackled at the ankle and forced to do hard labour. Hai tram hai's boat was intercepted by police thirty kilometres off the Vietnamese coast near Con Son Island and the passengers were all arrested. Subsequently, Hai tram hai was sent to reeducation camp for attempting to escape the country.

When Sau muoi bon's first escape attempt failed in 1988, he returned to his house only to find that it had been confiscated by the local authorities. Communist officials routinely confiscated refugees houses and other property after they fled. To reduce the impact of these losses, and also to pay for the cost of the journey, many refugees would liquidate any assets, if possible, in the months preceding their departure.

Respondents were questioned on what year they first attempted to escape from Vietnam. The results show that many respondents had repeatedly attempted to escape since 1975. Escape attempts were most numerous in 1989, when over a quarter of all respondents (27.7% or 30 persons) successfully fled at their first attempt (Figure 5.1). The increase in escape attempts in 1988 and 1989 coincides with the introduction of screening in Hong Kong (1988) and South East Asian asylum countries (1989).
FAMILY MEMBERS ALREADY OVERSEAS

A small number of respondents stated that they fled Vietnam to be reunited with family members living overseas. This raised an interesting question on what connections respondents had with persons living overseas. Respondents were asked whether they had any close family members living overseas before they escaped, and if so, whether they were in contact with them. Slightly more than half of all respondents (55.6% or 60 persons) had a total of eighty-nine relatives living overseas before they fled Vietnam. Siblings were the most common relatives living abroad, with sisters slightly more numerous than brothers (Table 5.3). Other close family members included husbands and sons, and there were also a considerable number of more distant relatives, such as cousins, uncles and aunts, and a small numbers of in-laws and unspecified relatives.
Table 5.3
Relatives Living Overseas Prior to Escaping

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RELATIVE</th>
<th>NUMBER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sister</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brother</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cousin</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncle</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husband</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aunt</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother-in-law</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brother-in-law</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unspecified Relative</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>89</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field study, 1994

Over forty per cent (43.8%) of relatives had resettled to the United States, and almost thirty per cent (29.2%) to Australia. There were six persons living in Hong Kong camps waiting to resettle to other countries, and a small number of relatives in other major resettlement countries—France, United Kingdom and Canada (Figure 5.2). Only seven respondents reported having relatives living in more than one country prior to their escape.

Most of the respondents who had relatives living in resettlement countries stated they were in regular contact with them before their own escape. In addition, many respondents also received letters from friends living in first asylum and resettlement countries while they were still in Vietnam. The communication from overseas enabled refugees to find out about conditions in both asylum and resettlement countries, and would have acted as a pull factor to encourage people to escape. For example, Bon muoi chin—a twenty-five year old ethnic Chinese woman—remarked that her younger brother left before her, and then wrote from Hong Kong advising her to also escape.

The high proportion of relatives living in Australia is to be expected considering the sampling frame for the study was refugees who had been accepted for resettlement to Australia. Many refugees would have chosen to go to Australia because of their relatives living there.
Figure 5.2
Countries where Respondents had Relatives Living,
Prior to Their Escape From Vietnam

The reunion of Tam muoi mot with his family was particularly interesting. Tam muoi mot fled to Hong Kong in September 1988 and obtained refugee status in December 1990. Upon obtaining refugee status he was transferred to the Pillar Point open camp, where he worked as a teacher. He wrote to his wife from the open camp advising her to escape, enclosing money he had earned in theHong Kong camp. His wife, son and sister arrived in Hong Kong in September 1991, and obtained refugee status in April 1994.

Source: Field study, 1994

Some refugees were paid a small wage for working in the Hong Kong camps. Teaching was one of the paid positions.
The Australian component of the research discovered an extensive chain migration among one family dating back to 1978, when the eldest brother first escaped from Vietnam. Since then, six siblings and their families have fled Vietnam and resettled in Melbourne under Australia’s Humanitarian Program. The family’s migration had not been completed in mid-1995, with the family of one brother still living in the Philippines camp following delays caused by Australian health requirements.

There is little doubt that information on the refugee situation in both asylum and resettlement countries has acted as a pull factor enticing some refugees to escape. The field study noted that many refugees received information on asylum and resettlement countries from friends and relatives living overseas. Many respondents also received financial assistance from friends and relatives overseas, as will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6. St. Cartmail (1983:94) found that some boat people made their decision to leave Vietnam after hearing encouraging news items on foreign radio. He cited the example of an eight metre fishing boat crammed with people that was rescued by the USS Wabash following a change of American refugee policy at the 1979 Geneva Conference. Bui Van Thu, one of the rescued refugees, later justified risking their lives to escape: “Once we knew the Seventh Fleet would help us, we thought our chances were good enough to make the try.” St. Cartmail added that many other boats would have left Vietnam motivated by the expectation. The objective in Truong Nhu Tang’s (1985:303) escape was to sail south toward the trade lanes, where they hoped they would be rescued by a freighter or tanker, “or perhaps by one of the U.S. Seventh Fleet Ships, which we had heard was in the area”. An American State Department survey of Vietnamese boat arrivals in Song Khla, Thailand in 1984 found that the refugees exhibited a high awareness of the perils of piracy and the provisions of the Thai humane deterrence policy (Tinker, 1985:2). The field study found that an overwhelming proportion of respondents had knowledge of the screening procedures in either Hong Kong or the Philippines prior to their escape.
The horrific details of escape attempts—both real and mythical—were openly publicised by the Vietnamese government to deter the public from escaping. Nguyen (1981:29) retold how security cadres would address public meetings to publicise about refugees who died from starvation and thirst at sea, had been raped and killed by Thai pirates, had drowned during storms, or had been arrested trying to escape and had all their property confiscated. Members of the Vietnamese public obtained more accurate accounts of escapes from listening clandestinely to Voice of America and British Broadcasting Corporation radio broadcasts.

**Organisation of Escape**

Once a person had made their decision to leave Vietnam, they had to arrange their escape out of the country. There were only three cases among respondents where the escapes were organised as family affairs. One of these was *Hai muoi mot*, a youth from Hue, whose father bought a nine metre boat for approximately two taels of gold, and then purchased an engine, fuel and other supplies. It took a month to organise thirty-two persons, mostly family and relatives, to escape aboard the small craft.

Another three respondents stated they were members of the organising group, and four other respondents stated that a family member was one of the organisers and arranged their escape. For example, *Chin muoi* and his wife were members of a group in Da Nang. His wife was assigned to buy the boat and his task was to contact people to escape. The group bought a forty-five tonne fishing boat—forty metres long and six metres wide—which the owner originally agreed to sell for twenty taels of gold, but later inflated the price to forty-five taels. Many of the boats purchased, especially the river vessels, were not suitable for journeys on the open sea and had to be modified to make the escape. Boats also had to be equipped with suitable engines, which were often difficult and expensive to acquire. For example, Nguyen (1981:30) purchased a 10.5 horsepower engine suitable for a small boat, or as an auxiliary on a larger vessel, for two
and a half taels of gold, which at the time was equivalent to eight years salary for a government official earning thirty-six dong a month.

The organising group also had to obtain supplies of gasoline, food and water. Fuel was purchased on the black market at heavily inflated prices, and then shifted to the departure spot and buried until it was needed for the voyage. Hai tram hai detailed the storage of fuel:

In my last escape, I had to spend about three months getting fuel, getting around twenty litres at a time. And then we have to find a very secret place to bury it, and have people to keep an eye on the cans. We buried a lot of small cans in various places. We accumulated 1,000 litres to escape, but in the end we had only 800 litres.

Another respondent commented that the storage of fuel “was very difficult, because we have no freedom for moving around. If the communist police find us, it was very serious for us.” It took almost six months to organise everything before his group eventually left.

A critical function of the organising group was to find a safe departure point. This usually involved a bribe to the local authorities so that the refugee-laden vessel could leave unchallenged. Bay muoi sau claimed that “the police of the communist government were easily bribed. They located the place where the boat was leaving from, and they guarantee those who want to escape.” Another respondent declared that his organisers paid the local authorities in Vung Tau three taels of gold to allow them to escape.

Prospective refugees were frequently referred to an organising group by friends or family who knew of their predicament and desire to escape. This occurred with forty-five respondents. According to Hai:

The people who wanted to escape could get tips from relatives and friends to contact the organisers. I contacted my relative about my intention to escape. The organisers made all the arrangements—destination, means of travel, route, food and other supplies. My escape depended entirely upon the organisers.
Organisers, generally close friends of the respondents, were contacted directly by six respondents, who knew they were planning an escape. Some prospective refugees were directly solicited about escaping by the organisers. Sau, was one of eleven respondents contacted by an organiser. He said that “an organiser who was in much the same predicament as myself” told him about the boat that was ready to leave Vietnam, and asked whether he wanted to escape with them. Another two respondents stated that they were recruited by organisers to join their escape bid because of their mechanical and navigational skills. For example, Hai muoi bon claimed that the owner of the boat, who was his neighbour, asked him to become the leader and sail the boat in the escape bid because he was a fisherman and experienced with the weather and the sea. Similarly, Ba muoi ba claimed that he was hired by an organising group who knew he had previously been a sailor and knew how to sail and fix engines.

According to one respondent, Bay muoi sau, the use of mediators (or “middlemen”) had made escaping easier in latter years. He claimed:

Before 1985 it was difficult for the people who wanted to escape. But it became easier after 1985 as the organisers [or boat owners] would contact the people through a mediator [or middleman].

Intermediaries arranged the escapes of twenty-seven respondents, including Nam muoi tam, who was introduced to the middleman by a friend. She said “the first time the middleman did not believe us. We asked the middleman many times to help us. So he went and found out about us, and then he approved us” [to join the group].

Some persons specialised in conveying refugees across the Vietnamese-Chinese border and arranging meetings with other organisers for the boat trip to Hong Kong. For example, Chin muoi hai and his three siblings each paid 30,000 dong to a Viet hoa man they met in Mong Gai, to take them across the border to meet an organiser in China. It was possible to escape overland from Vietnam to China without a guide, as four respondents testified. Mot tram tam stated that it was easy for Vietnamese to visit China

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32 A “middleman” (or mediator) was a person who recruited passengers on behalf of the boat owners.
in 1989 and 1990 because of an agreement between the governments of Vietnam and China permitting Vietnamese to visit relatives in China. Sau muoi sau, a northerner from Quang Ninh, claimed that he “walked to China through the forest”, while Bon muoi chin—an ethnic Chinese from southern Vietnam—travelled to Hanoi by train then caught another train from there to near the Chinese border. She then crossed into China, and found assistance to escape to Hong Kong.

**WAITING TO LEAVE**

There was frequently a lengthy waiting period between the first contact about escape and the actual departure. This was a period of heightened anxiety, as the prospective refugees, and especially the organisers, worried about whether their plans would be fulfilled. Respondents were asked how long they waited while the escape attempt was being organised. Responses varied from just a few hours notice of an impending escape, to three years of thorough planning before finally leaving (Table 5.4).

Many of the twenty-five respondents who fled at short notice (i.e. less than one week) had been asked by friends or relatives if they wanted to accompany them on the escape only when the boat was ready. Many organisers waited until arrangements were almost completed before they recruited passengers, as a strategy to reduce knowledge about the escape until the last moment. Some respondents said that the organisers knew that they wanted to escape, and told them a few days beforehand that there was a boat leaving. The majority of respondents had to wait considerably longer for the escape to be organised, with forty-five respondents (41.7%) waiting between one and four weeks, and twenty-four persons (22.2%) waiting between two and twelve months.

It frequently took a long time to organise escapes due to the difficulties involved acquiring everything needed for the sea voyage. Not only was it illegal to escape, which was punished by imprisonment if caught, but it was also illegal to possess items for escaping, such as binoculars, compasses, maps, and even fuel as Hai tram hai explained:
It is very normal in your country or elsewhere to buy binoculars, but in Vietnam if you have binoculars in your possession, you could be arrested by police, the government or by the local authorities because it is an instrument for escaping. Some people were in prison for two or three years because they had binoculars with them. If you had any instrument which could be used for assisting an escape, such as binoculars, compass, maps, and even oil, you could be gaoled.

Table 5.4
Length of Time Waiting for Escape to be Organised

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Length of time to escape</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 1 day</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1–6 days</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>17.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 week</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 weeks</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 weeks</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 month</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 months</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 months</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 months</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 months</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7–11 months</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 1 year</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others arranged</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>their escape</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Escaped independently to China</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Didn’t plan to escape</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field study, 1994

THE PRICE OF FREEDOM

A “ticket” to freedom was generally not cheap. The field study attempted to establish how much respondents paid to escape, although it was not possible to find out the cost in all cases as some persons had their passage paid by relatives (ten cases) or friends (six cases), or did not know about the price (nine cases). In addition, twenty
respondents did not pay for the voyage, including eight persons who were provided with free travel because of their mechanical or navigational skills and five persons who were friends or relatives of the organisers. Another two stated they begged to be allowed on board, one case embarked by accident, and another was working on the boat when it escaped. Members of organising groups generally contributed to the cost of the boat and other supplies, so did not pay for the passage, as was the case with seven respondents. According to one refugee, the price for escaping was negotiated between the passenger and the organiser or middleman. He estimated the average price in 1989 from southern Vietnam at one tael of gold per person, although he commented that some paid higher and others lower amounts, depending on negotiations.

The most cautious arrangement for payment was determined by Sau muoi sau. Initially, he paid nothing, but when he arrived in Hong Kong he wrote a letter to his parents, and they paid the organisers in Vietnam. Ba muoi told the organisers that he did not have the money to pay them. However, the organisers accepted him aboard the boat on the condition that he would repay the money if he resettled to another country. This delayed repayment scheme was apparently a strategy used by trip organisers, boat owners and Chinese businessmen to transfer gold and hard currency overseas through trusted participants in the escape.33

Only half of all respondents (51.6% or 56 persons) were prepared to divulge how much they had paid to the organisers to escape. The majority—fifty—of these people paid for the journey in gold, with prices ranging from 0.3 tael for a single person to nine taels for a family of three, with an average price of 2.2 taels. The cost to escape to the Philippines was generally more expensive than the trip to Hong Kong. A total of 73.8 taels of gold was paid by twenty-five respondents to travel to the Philippines, at an

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33 It has been common practice since the late 1970s for people with gold and/or other wealth in Vietnam to ask relatives overseas to contact other overseas Vietnamese who had relatives in Vietnam who needed money. Agreements on amounts would be made: the overseas relatives would tell the overseas contact how much, this contact would tell their relatives in Vietnam who would then give the required money to the designated family.
average price of 2.95 taels, whereas the same number of respondents paid only 38.7 taels (average 1.55) to travel to Hong Kong. The remaining six persons paid for their escape paid in a variety of currencies, including American dollars, Chinese yuan and Vietnamese dong. These prices are considerably cheaper than those charged in the late 1970s and early 1980s (see Chapter 3).

**FLIGHT TO FREEDOM**

The flight to freedom varied considerably for almost every refugee. Their escapes took many routes, of varying duration, often aboard different types of boats (although nearly always overcrowded), and they endured various difficulties on their journeys. This section is a summary of those flights.

**THE ROUTE TO ASYLUM**

The mode and route of the escape were generally determined by the escape organisers, with refugees having little or no input, except those refugees who organised their own escape. Hong Kong was the final destination for six out of ten respondents (60.2% or 65 persons), and more than half of them (55.4% or 36 persons) originated from northern Vietnam. In contrast, only one of the forty-three respondents who arrived in the Philippines originated from the North. The northern province of Quang Ninh—which abuts China—was the most common area of departure, while in southern Vietnam, Khanh Hoa province, was the most frequent province of departure. Other major departure areas were Hai Phong and Quang Nam-Da Nang provinces and Ho Chi Minh City.

The flight of refugees from Vietnam has been characterised as a dangerous voyage on the high seas in small, grossly overcrowded boats. While this is true for the majority of Vietnamese refugees, there were a small number of respondents who travelled a considerable portion of their journey overland, and only completed the final,
short section of the journey in a boat. The relative ease with which Vietnamese, especially those of Chinese descent, were able to travel through China meant that this route was often favoured by organisers. The survey revealed that sixteen respondents initially travelled overland to China—either by themselves or with organisers—and then joined larger groups to travel on to Hong Kong.34

One of the favoured routes for ethnic Chinese from southern Vietnam was to travel by train from Ho Chi Minh City to Hanoi, and then catch a bus or train from the capital to the Chinese border. After crossing the border into China by foot, they would travel to the Chinese coast where they would catch a boat to Hong Kong. Respondents such as Hai completed their trip via this route in just six days. Other refugees, like Bon muoi, elected to cross into China on their own. He travelled by bus from his home in Ho Chi Minh City to Nha Trang, then to Hanoi, Hong Gai, and the Vietnamese/Chinese border. Here he swam across the river and went to the Chinese coast, where he boarded a boat to sail to Hong Kong, which only took him eleven hours.

Tam muoi chi paid a young man to sail his bamboo boat to China, while he and his two daughters escaped overland, followed later by his wife and son. When they all reunited in China they set off, together with other passengers, to Hong Kong. Some refugees bought their boats in China. Bon muoi mot escaped with his friend by foot into China, and bought a small boat in Thai Binh, and later sailed to Hong Kong. Nam muoi nam was an ethnic Vietnamese who fled into China because he had feared imprisonment in Vietnam. He stated that he had no intention to go to Hong Kong, until he arrived in China and some friends there bought a boat.

Despite the apparent ease of travelling overland through China, most refugees left Vietnam in boats. Organisers arranged for vessels to depart from wharves in the

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34 A seventeenth respondent—Mot muoi chin—escaped by himself by climbing over the mountains near Mong Gai in Quang Linh province and walking through the forest into China. However, he returned to Vietnam after three days because he considered it would have been too difficult for him to travel overland to Hong Kong by himself. Instead, he went to Hai Phong, where he boarded a refugee boat bound for Hong Kong.
main port cities such as Hai Phong and Ho Chi Minh City, or else from isolated beaches along Vietnam’s 3,444 kilometres of coastline, or from the myriad of inland waterways.

**PRECEDES TO ESCAPING**

Many escape attempts failed because security cadres detected families in the process of leaving. Therefore, the time prior to escape was particularly secretive, with prospective refugees not giving any indication of their intentions to escape. This was reiterated by *Ba muoi lam*, who was part of a group that built a boat in Ho Chi Minh City. He said “the organisers did not let me know what other things were going on. They keep things very secretive, so the authorities don’t find out.” Another ruse used by organisers so police would not find out about the boat was, according to *Muoi sau*, to change the departure point from one place to another until the escape was ready. Even on their way to the departure place, refugees like *Tam muoi tam* “were always frightened that the communist police will find out we are escaping”.

Prospective refugees not only faced the problem of communist authorities finding out about departures, but other people as well, as *Bay muoi tam* testified: “The people living in Cam Ranh they know the departure date and got on board. If the organiser did not allow them to go, they would report us to the communist police. It was very dangerous for us.”

The most difficult aspect of organising an escape according to *Hai tram hai*, was getting the passengers on board. Organisers often adopted intricate procedures to board their passengers, that varied according to the place of departure. Boats that left from main towns and cities often boarded passengers directly onto the boats from a wharf. For example, the organiser gave *Bon* a card with a number on it, and told him to go to an address in Ho Chi Minh City. He arrived at the “safe house” and submitted his card, and then waited with others in the house for two days. At midnight on the second day, the organiser took the group to a wharf where they boarded directly onto their boat.
Some organisers left the ports empty, to avoid suspicion, and then waited off the
Vietnamese coast for the passengers to be ferried out by smaller boats. The prospective
refugees aboard Hai muoi hay's boat caught a bus from Ho Chi Minh City to a
rendezvous point about ten or fifteen kilometres from Vung Tau, where the organisers
had bribed the local authorities. Once all the passengers had gathered, they were
separated into ten or twelve small boats, and paddled out to the larger escape boat. It
took eight or nine hours to get the forty passengers aboard the main boat in what Hai
tram hai commented was a very, very tense time. Unfortunately, about fifteen
passengers were left behind, after they apparently became lost in the dark.

The danger of using small boats to ferry passengers was experienced by Nam
muoi tam. His wife and their two children were transported from their home to the
departure point by her brother on a motorcycle, while he travelled by bus on his own.
At a secluded beach in Phu Yen province, the woman and her son boarded a small boat
to take them out to the main boat anchored well off-shore. Nam muoi tam's wife told
how she waited anxiously for her brother and daughter to arrive on another of the many
boats that ferried passengers, but they never arrived. She later learned that the small
boat that carried her brother and daughter had become lost and could not locate the main
boat in the darkness.

The myriad of Vietnam's inland waterways, especially in the Mekong and Red
River Deltas, were the origin of many escape bids. A detailed description of the
precedents to departure from one inland waterway was narrated by Mot tram bon. He
stated:

the cigarette vendor told me to go to his place and stay there for the
night. At 4:00 am he took me to a place and I boarded a bus with army
registration plates. They took us to a small village with only a few
people living there. There was a small river there, with a small boat
waiting for us. We boarded the boat and they took us to somewhere
along the river to another river—I don't know where, but it was a very
big river. It was about midnight or so. They made some signals with
flashlights and then told us to move into a bigger boat to get across the
ocean for escape. Then we had to get down into the hold, and we didn’t know anything for the rest of the night.

Vietnam’s rivers were closely guarded by security cadres, who intercepted boats suspected of carrying people instead of freight. To avoid detection, refugees remained below deck until safely out to sea, as *Mot tram bon* stated. Nguyen (1981:130) claimed that small children were often given sleeping tablets to ensure that absolute silence was maintained until the boat was out to sea.

**THE BOATS**

Boats of all descriptions were used in escape attempts from Vietnam. St. Cartmail (1983:177) previously noted that Vietnamese refugees fled aboard “dilapidated barges, motorised fishing boats, eighteen or twenty foot long open skiffs with bamboo lashed to the gunwales for extra buoyancy or in other bizarre-looking tiny craft”. He observed that refugees from northern—and sometimes central—Vietnam frequently escaped aboard “junks of ancient Chinese design, characterised by low bows and high stern, and wind propelled by rough sails of multi-coloured canvas”. In contrast, the boats leaving from the Mekong delta in southern Vietnam were more likely to be equipped with engines “that seem invariably to break down at some stage on the journey” across the South China Sea (St. Cartmail, 1983:91–92).

Respondents were asked to estimate the size of the boats that they escaped aboard, and their crude estimations varied from small four metre craft that carried four persons on a short journey from China to Hong Kong, to a forty metre long fishing boat. The smallest boat among respondents to sail across the South China Sea to the Philippines was just six metres long and only one and a half metres wide. A rough indication of the boat sizes can be seen in Appendix 4, which shows boat dimensions and the number of refugees aboard. Many boats were no more than open dinghies designed for the inland waterways of Vietnam, while the more fortunate sailed aboard more appropriate ocean-going fishing boats.
Boats were constructed from a variety of materials, ranging from the traditional wooden vessels to concrete and bamboo craft. The ten metre boat that carried Muoi bon from Hai Phong was built of concrete. Tam muoi chin described the boat that he escaped aboard as being “made of bamboo, weaved together. There were many holes at the joins. I had to put tar to cover the holes.” He added that they had to purchase foam floats in China to make the boat more buoyant. “We covered the outside of the boat with foam, otherwise if the twenty-four people got aboard the boat would sink.” The group only travelled at night, because during the day they went ashore to dry the tar on the boat.

Although engines powered most boats, some only had sails. One of these was the six metre boat that Bay muoi bon escaped aboard. He told how they had to rent another boat, for fourth-tenths of a tael of gold, to pull their boat out of Vietnamese waters.

The relics of four refugee boats stood in the main square of the PRPC camp, as a memorial to those persons who risked their lives in search for freedom (Appendix 4). The boats ranged from a large ten metre fishing boat to a four metre open dinghy. An inscription on this latter boat described how it was spotted in the water by local residents, who initially thought that it was a floating log. However, upon closer inspection they found ten refugees aboard, who had collapsed from starvation and dehydration.

**Passengers Aboard the Boats**

The customary image of a Vietnamese refugee boat is a small craft, so overcrowded with people that it is almost sinking. Conditions aboard respondents’ boats varied considerably, with passenger numbers varying between four and 247. For example, the twenty-one metre vessel that carried 247 people to the Philippines was very crowded according to one of the passengers—Tam muoi lam—who claimed that
there was no room for sleeping, only room to sit. Furthermore, the meals were “very miserable”, with only a handful of rice to eat and some ice to suck.

The average number of persons aboard refugee boats was calculated at sixty-eight persons from information obtained during the field study. Boats travelling to the Philippines had a higher average (86 persons) compared to those that sailed to Hong Kong (57 persons). The Hong Kong figure is considerably higher than the thirty-two person average calculated from Hong Kong Immigration Department statistics between 1980 and mid-1995 (Hong Kong Government, 1995c).

Not surprisingly, respondents generally described conditions aboard the refugee boats as very crowded, with only room to sit and not to lay down or walk around. It was so crowded aboard Nam muoi tam’s boat that they all had to sit with their knees pulled up to their chests. She added that there was not even room for her young son to lay down to sleep. Sau muoi sau stated that it was so crowded aboard his boat, with 108 persons aboard, that “the edge of the boat was just above the water and the boat nearly sank”. Tam muoi claimed that there was really only room for fifteen people aboard their small boat, yet it carried thirty-two people from Hanoi to Hong Kong. There was just enough room to sit for the thirty-three persons aboard the sixteen metre long and one-and-a-half metre wide boat that Tam muoi bay escaped aboard. He added “if we walked around, the boat would capsize”. The former twenty metre fishing boat that Bay muoi ba escaped aboard was bigger than most other boats, but “was not comfortable for 103 persons, [even though] there is room to walk around”.

Conditions aboard Bon muoi hai’s small boat were reasonable when the ten persons left Phu Thuan. However, when they reached Hainan Island they found twelve Vietnamese who had been shipwrecked, and invited them aboard their boat, making conditions very crowded.

Only eight respondents stated that conditions aboard the boat they escaped aboard were not overcrowded. These were generally larger vessels, such as the nineteen metre long and three-and-a-half metre wide boat that Ba muoi tam and eighty-nine other
persons escaped aboard. He said that there was room to lay down and walk around, and estimated that the boat could have carried 200 passengers. *Muoi bay* declared that conditions on his boat were also good, as it was not too crowded and there was room to move around. Similarly, there was room to lay down and walk around on the former fishing boat that *Nam muoi hai* escaped aboard, with a hold that could store twenty tonnes of fish.

**ESCAPE**

The escape journey, although both difficult and exhausting, was considered by one young Vietnamese youth as an expedition in search of freedom. In a brief written account of his escape, he wrote:

> My escape from Vietnam by boat on the ocean. It’s similar [to] the discovery trip of Columbus or any people who negotiate the ocean for many days on the boat without water and food. All people call them heroes. But we are the people who are looking for freedom.

The pursuit for freedom took refugees on many different routes to the first asylum countries. Sixteen respondents undertook the overland route through China and a short boat trip to Hong Kong and forty-nine respondents sailed the entire route from Vietnam to Hong Kong. There were forty-three respondents who arrived in the Philippines, including thirteen respondents who were fortuitously rescued at sea by other vessels and taken to safety.

**DEPARTURE**

The peak of the exodus out of Vietnam among respondents was during 1989, when more than half (58.3% or 63 persons) of those interviewed left (Figure 5.3). Only ten respondents (9.3%) escaped from Vietnam before 1989: nine went to Hong Kong in 1988 and one sailed to the Philippines in 1985.³⁵

³⁵ *Nam muoi bon* escaped from Hai Phong in August 1985, and arrived in the Philippines after forty-eight days sailing. At that time there was no CPA in force, so *Nam muoi bon* would have been automatically granted refugee status. For reasons unbeknown to the refugee, or which he did not
This pattern of refugee departures was no doubt influenced by the introduction of the Comprehensive Plan of Action, which is discussed in more detail in Chapter 6. The effectiveness of the CPA can be gauged by the decline in respondent departures after 1989: just twenty-seven (25.0%) in 1990 and eight (7.4%) in 1991.

**DURATION OF FLIGHT**

The duration of journeys from Vietnam to the asylum country varied enormously, depending on factors such as the point of departure, the route taken, the mode of transport, the number of passengers, and the problems encountered along the way. According to respondents’ accounts of their escapes, a boat journey from southern Vietnam to the Philippines could be completed in just four days if everything was favourable. Similarly, it was also possible to travel from northern Vietnam to Hong
Kong by boat in just five days, or overland from Ho Chi Minh City to Hong Kong in just six days using a variety of different types of transport. However, at the other end of the scale, journeys could also drag on for months when plagued by mechanical and weather problems.

**OVERLAND THROUGH CHINA**

The overland route through China, even from Ho Chi Minh City, was a very quick journey when organised precisely, as three ethnic Chinese respondents testified. They reiterated that it only took two days and three nights to travel by train from Ho Chi Minh City to Hanoi, and then a day from the Vietnamese capital to the Vietnamese-Chinese border by bus, where organisers guided them on foot into China. The three respondents, who all travelled at different times, then travelled north by car for two days to the Chinese coastal town of Yuan Ye, where the groups boarded small boats to travel the short distance to Hong Kong, while the organisers returned to Vietnam. The final journey to Hong Kong took Hai only four hours to complete.

However, not all overland journeys were as swift. Refugees who boarded boats in southern China, rather than travel further north before boarding, spent far more time at sea. For example, it took only one day and one night for Ba muoi mot to travel overland to China, then another twenty-one days to reach Hong Kong. Some refugees who fled into China by themselves—and not as part of an organised escape—spent lengthy periods in China waiting to board a boat so they could complete their journey, including four respondents who waited more than a month to get passage to Hong Kong.

Despite the apparent ease of fleeing Vietnam into China, four respondents testified of difficulties travelling through China. When Sau muoi tam escaped to China, her boat was damaged and they were all subsequently arrested by the Chinese police, who sent them back to Vietnam. She claimed that the group only managed to continue their escape after they bribed the local Vietnamese authorities by giving them all their possessions. The Vietnamese police then obtained a boat for them and permitted them
to leave. However, the second boat broke down in China, and the sixteen refugees had to wait in China until they received money from the United States to enable them to purchase a new engine. It took almost six months for them to complete their journey to Hong Kong.

When Chin muoi mot arrived in China, the police searched the house where he was living and asked why he was there. He replied that he was visiting friends, so the police fined him for being in China illegally and issued him a warning about being in the country. He promptly prepared food, water and fuel and hurriedly left for Hong Kong. Chin muoi bay, an ethnic Chinese from Ha Tuyen province in northern Vietnam, decided to return to his “ancestors’ motherland” because of the pressures put on the Viet hoa by the Vietnamese government. He thought that the Chinese would accept his family, but when they arrived the Chinese government did not allow him to live there, so he escaped again to Hong Kong.

It only took three days for Tam muoi tam’s boat to reach China from Da Nang. During their five day stay in China, five refugees aboard the boat returned to Vietnam. Tam muoi tam claimed that they were scared after some Chinese men wanted to rape the Vietnamese girls. In Sau muoi lam’s group, ten of the thirty-two persons returned to Vietnam from China after experiencing problems with the boat and being rescued by Chinese fishermen. After Sau muoi hai’s boat broke down on Hainan Island, five of the sixty-eight persons on board left to travel overland through China.

**HONG KONG**

The average boat journey among respondents from Vietnam to Hong Kong was thirty days. This figure is heavily inflated by two trips that took six and seven months respectively to complete. These two trips, and a number of others, were delayed in China for lengthy periods, either to repair engines, obtain supplies, or wait for storms to pass. Almost one-third (32.6% or 16) of Hong Kong-bound boats took more than one
month to complete their journey. In contrast, one boat completed the trip in just five days.

The north-bound boats had the advantage of being able to sail along the Chinese coast, which was not only a useful navigational aid, it also provided sanctuary when problems occurred—as they frequently did. Refugees could easily go ashore in China to buy or beg supplies, fix engines, or wait-out storms. It also allowed smaller and less sea-worthy vessels, such as the eight metre boat that Ba muoi mot escaped aboard, to travel by day and go ashore at night. These factors all contributed to the extended lengths of many voyages.

Despite the advantages of this route, it was still a hazardous journey, as Tam muoi bon asserted: “it was very dangerous with seventy people aboard a very slim boat with a big storm. But we still go.” According to Bay muoi chin, the Hainan Strait between mainland China and Hainan Island was strewn with Vietnamese boats that had broken down or been shipwrecked.

**The Philippines**

The main advantage of the eastern route to the Philippines was that it crossed the international shipping lanes in the South China Sea, where it was possible to be rescued by passing ships. This occurred to thirteen of the forty-three respondents who arrived in the Philippines (described in more detail below). The boat journeys to the Philippines for the remaining thirty respondents varied from four to forty-five days, with an average of just nine days. Over seventy per cent of these thirty respondents (71.4% or 20 persons) were at sea for less than ten days, with only three respondents taking longer than eleven days—including one boat that sailed from the northern Vietnamese port of Hai Phong and was at sea for forty-five days (Table 5.5).
Table 5.5

Length of Boat Journey to the Philippines

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Length of journey</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
<th>Cumulative per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4 days</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 days</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>6 days</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16.7</td>
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<td>7</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>60.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>9 days</td>
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<td>10 days</td>
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<td>11 days</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>83.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 days</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>86.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 days</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>90.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 days</td>
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<td>3.3</td>
<td>93.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>2</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field study, 1994

The boat on which Bon muoi ba travelled initially sailed south-east from southern Vietnam and landed in Brunei after five days. Brunei officials told the refugees that there was no asylum camp in the country and advised them to sail on to the Philippines. They were permitted to stay in Brunei for three days while they repaired the engine, and were provided with additional supplies. The boat-load of sixty-nine people then sailed for another three days until they reached Tapita Island in the Philippines.

The different refugee narratives of their escapes from Vietnam, and the problems and hardships encountered along the way, provide a useful insight into this often hazardous journey. Mot tram bon’s description of his escape from Vietnam stood out from all the 108 narratives of refugee escapes. He was nineteen years old when he fled Ho Chi Minh City in 1990. The initial part of his journey to a river in the Mekong Delta has been described above. His recital of the journey continues aboard the boat:
The next morning [after leaving the river] all I saw was the sky and the ocean, and I could see the shore not too far away. The Vietnamese organiser told us to give him our Vietnamese money, because we would have to use dollars. The organiser threw a plank into the ocean and swam ashore, taking the Vietnamese money. He went ashore to organise other escapes. From there we went along the Vietnamese coast until we reached Nha Trang, and then we turned ninety degrees [East].

The boat was more than ten metres long and over two metres wide. It was very crowded—151 persons—we all sleep next to each other. Also by that way we could keep warm. There was a flat area to sleep in—a large area in back and a small area in front.

The first day from Nha Trang our engine failed. We just waited on the boat, we could do nothing. Then some people got an idea to start the engine. There was a big steel wheel and we tried to whip the wheel. There were nine of us—four on either side and one in the middle. We tried to make it rotate to get it started. We could not get it started until it was almost night. And when the engine started some of them wanted to go back to Vietnam. However, the majority of us wanted to go to the Philippines. The majority won.

And we went on. After about two or three days we got into international waters, and we thought that a foreigner ship would welcome us. When we saw a very big boat we tried to stop them to help us, but they sailed away. Somebody got to the top of the boat and waved a shirt, and made a little fire on the top. We thought they saw it, but they ignored it. Finally we got in the way of a big British merchant ship. They veered their way around and turned around. They asked us to move our boat to their big ship. They allowed two of us to board the ship to ask if we need things. All of us want them to take us aboard their ship, but they refused. They gave us a big can of oil and all the water we needed. Some crew members threw down blankets, cigarettes, food and some other things. They told us which direction we should go in order to reach the Philippines. They asked us to go.

We continued our trip and followed their directions. A few days or a week—I don’t remember exactly, I think a week—we were going to run out of water again. There was a hole in the boat and the water got in. The rudder fell to the bottom of the sea, and we could not steer the boat. And we waited there one or two days, and then we saw a Philippines fishing ship. We quickly moved towards them, but they moved away. So we waited again, until we saw another ship. And this time the ship didn’t rescue us because it was only a small ship. They gave us fish, rice and water, then left. And then we saw a bigger fishing ship. This ship also refused to rescue us. We had no way but to run after them—run, run, run. Once they stopped and see how our boat and everyone look, they saw we could go no longer. They took all of us into the ship and we
stay on that ship for nine days, before we got to Manila. ... On 24 May 1990 we arrived at the Transit Center in Manila.

**Rescued at Sea**

*Mot tram bon* was just one of fourteen respondents who were rescued at sea by other ships and taken to safety in Hong Kong, the Philippines or other Asian countries. They were fortunate to have been rescued at sea, for although the refugees sighted many ships at sea, few stopped to offer assistance, and even fewer took boat people aboard. Another of this fortunate group was *Tam muoi hai*, who was aboard a small boat that was repeatedly lashed by storms for five days. The seven persons aboard the boat decided to turn back and wait to be rescued in the South China Sea shipping lanes. Their small craft floundered hopelessly on the sea with a broken engine, and without food or water. Although many foreign ships passed by, it was not until the ninth day that a Greek ship came to their rescue. The group was taken aboard the ship and spent sixteen days sailing to Taiwan. They were later flown from Taiwan to the Philippines, via Hong Kong (Table 5.6).

**Table 5.6**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cases</th>
<th>Nationality of Rescue Ship</th>
<th>First Country of Call</th>
<th>Country of First Asylum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Norwegian</td>
<td>South Korea*</td>
<td>Philippines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Russian</td>
<td>Singapore*</td>
<td>Philippines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Greek</td>
<td>Taiwan*</td>
<td>Philippines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>U.S. Navy</td>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Singaporean</td>
<td>Hong Kong*</td>
<td>Philippines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>U.S. Navy</td>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>Philippines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Filipino</td>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>Philippines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>TOTAL 14</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Transferred from the first port of call to country of first asylum

Source: Field study, 1994
Another three respondents were also rescued at sea and taken to Asian ports, and later transferred to the Philippines, including Sau muoi bon who was rescued from an oil rig in Malaysia by a Russian ship and taken to Singapore. However, because of Singapore’s stringent asylum regulations, alternative arrangements had to be made for the asylum-seekers. After three days in Singapore the group was granted asylum by the Philippines government and taken to the first asylum camp at Palawan. Hai muoi bon claimed that his boat was pulled into Hong Kong by a Singaporean ship, but the colony’s government did not allow the boat people to land, so the ship’s captain telephoned the Philippines government to seek asylum for the thirty-four asylum-seekers. The group remained aboard the boat as it sailed from Hong Kong to Manila. They arrived at the PRTC in Manila on 21 June 1990, thirty-two days after they left Vietnam.

United States Navy ships on patrol in the South China Sea rescued four respondents and took them to the Subic Bay Naval Base in the Philippines, while a fifth respondent was taken to Hong Kong. A Filipino oil tanker rescued one respondent and took his group to Subic Bay, while four respondents were rescued by Filipino fishing vessels and taken to Manila Bay.

Respondents spent an average of seven days aboard the refugee boats before being rescued by foreign ships, with the actual period adrift varying from two to thirteen days. Their time aboard the rescue ships varied between two to seventy-nine days, including time in transit countries, before arriving at the first asylum countries.

While most boat people were happy just to have been rescued at sea and taken to any destination, the group that included Mot tram mot was more particular where they went. His boat was assisted by a British ship and given food and water. Mot tram mot claimed that the British captain wanted to take the group to Hong Kong, but the group did not agree. They remained in their eighteen metre boat until rescued by a Filipino fishing boat and taken to Manila Bay. This suggests that the boat people were aware of
the conditions in the different first asylum countries, and wanted to go to the Philippines at all costs.

**DIFFICULTIES DURING FLIGHT**

Interviews with respondents revealed that the boat journeys were frequently plagued with problems. Almost three-quarters of respondents (72.2% or 78 persons) stated that they encountered difficulties on the boat journey, with the lack of food and water the most common problems (Table 5.7). Over half of all respondents (54.6% or 59 persons) stated that they lacked food on the boat, including Tam muoi, who claimed that “although the organiser prepared the food, it was not enough. We only ate enough for surviving. We have to beg for food from Chinese.” Bay muoi chin claimed that he and the other passengers were only given the “soup of rice” to eat, while the organisers ate rice. The organiser of Bay muoi bon’s boat prepared twenty kilograms of rice and a little water for the seventeen passengers, but they soon ran out of provisions on their journey which lasted thirty-seven days. Bay muoi tam—and four other respondents—stated that they suffered from hunger because storms had made it impossible to cook aboard the boats, and in some cases, had soaked the food supplies.

**Table 5.7**

Problems Encountered on Journeys

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of food</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water shortages</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boat problems</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weather difficulties</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of fuel</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some respondents encountered more than one problem.

Source: Field study, 1994
The second most common problem was the lack of water, which was mentioned by nearly half of all respondents (48.1% or 52 persons). Water was strictly rationed aboard many boats, such as on Nam muoi tam’s, where passengers were allotted only two spoons of water a day. She also claimed that they were only given instant noodles to eat, which made her very thirsty. Therefore she stopped eating them, and only consumed her water allowance.

Many of the frail refugee boats broke down on the arduous journeys, with twenty-three respondents (21.3%) mentioning mechanical or structural problems aboard their boats. Engine failure was the most common mechanical problem, and leaks were the main structural difficulty. Boats travelling north to Hong Kong had the benefit of being able to land in China to make repairs, whereas boats heading east to the Philippines could only hope to be rescued by a passing ship.

Typhoons frequently rage across the South China Sea from the Philippines to Vietnam and southern China, making sea voyages very dangerous. Many of the respondents’ boats encountered adverse weather conditions, particularly storms, that subjected the refugees to additional danger. According to Bay muoi bon, “We were near death many times ... there were many storms, and I thought everybody would die. We tied our hands together and prepared to die” (because they wanted to die together). However, the storm passed and there was a clear sky and they could see the land. They went ashore to fix the boat and spent seven days in China before continuing on to Hong Kong.

Occasionally, there were problems aboard boats between fellow passengers. This was mentioned by three respondents, including Bay muoi bon. She said that:

The organiser and his relatives beat the people to force them to throw out their money and gold. Some people gave them their gold possessions and some hid them. One woman hid US$200 under the [trade]mark of her jeans. The gang beat her, until she could not suffer any more and told them about the money. Even when gang got money they still beat her with hammer.
Vietnamese gangs aboard Bay muoi bay’s boat also forced refugees to give them money. Northerners and southerners fought over food aboard Muoi ba’s boat. She also claimed that some of the northerners wanted to abuse the women and girls on the boat, and because of this her family wanted to swim away from the boat. However, they stayed on board until they reached Hong Kong.

**SUMMARY**

The extensive narratives obtained from interviews with respondents, together with historical sources, has provided a detailed and personal insight into the difficulties experienced by a proportion of the Vietnamese population, their reasons for fleeing the country, and details of their escapes. These are the first three stages of the Vietnamese refugee experience.

This chapter has detailed how the Socialist Republic of Vietnam government made living conditions arduous for a significant proportion of the population following the fall of South Vietnam in 1975. The government discriminated against various sections of the Vietnamese population as retribution for thirty years of fighting. For example, the government retaliated against former members of the South Vietnamese administration and military through imprisonment and reeducation. The reeducation camps were brutal establishments, where the authorities attempted to physically and psychologically “break” prisoners. The family of former South Vietnamese administration and military personnel were frequently deprived of education and employment opportunities because of their parents’ activities for the South Vietnam government.

Another government initiative was to coerce large numbers of people—including former regime members and their families, ethnic minorities, and other “less desirable” sections of the population—to relocate to rural parts of the country. Living conditions in the New Economic Zones were usually very difficult, due to the lack of planning and
resources, and the high incidence of diseases. Inhabitants, who often had little farming experience, were expected to clear and farm land that was frequently unsuitable for agriculture.

There was widespread persecution of ethnic minority and religious groups throughout Vietnam. The government deliberately disadvantaged vast numbers of people with the adoption of a multi-tiered society, that differentiated food availability, access to health facilities, employment and education opportunities depending on a person’s status and history in society.

Conditions in Vietnam became so abhorrent for millions of people that they sought a solution to the problem—fleeing the country and seeking a new life in another country. This chapter has outlined the reasons why the 108 respondents interviewed in the Philippines decided to escape Vietnam. Their responses are fairly typical of the root causes behind the mass exodus of Vietnamese refugees since 1975.

Prospective refugees were willing to risk imprisonment, loss of property, perilous journeys in unseaworthy vessels across dangerous seas to seek asylum in a nearby country and plead their case for refugee status which would enable them to be resettled to the West. However, not everyone who considered escaping actually attempted to flee. Some people were captured attempting to escape, while others never had the means or money to leave. Many respondents told how previous attempts had failed and how they attempted to escape Vietnam numerous times before they were eventually successful. Escape—or attempted escape—from Vietnam was a criminal offence, punishable by imprisonment and sometimes even reeducation. Consequently, the organization of an escape was a secretive affair. This chapter has described some of the difficulties that often arose attempting to flee the country.

The exodus of Vietnamese has been typified by the journey of overcrowded and ill-equipped boats across pirate-infested waters. Many of the respondents interviewed in this study endured such journeys, and described the boats they travelled aboard and the difficulties they encountered en route. However, the study revealed that a number of
respondents travelled an overland route through China to Hong Kong, which was far less dangerous than the typical sea voyage. Details of some of these overland escape journeys are also included.

The flight of Vietnamese boat people was not the end of the refugee experience, but the end of the Vietnam stages and the beginning of the asylum stages. The asylum stage signals a halfway point in the refugee migration—halfway from hell and halfway to paradise. It is a very difficult and testing time for asylum-seekers and marks an important crossroad in the Vietnamese refugee experience. It is during the asylum stage that the future path of the migration is determined—either onwards to one of the resettlement countries, back to Vietnam, or perhaps even a standoff in the first asylum country. This mid-point of asylum is the focus of the next chapter.
I didn’t believe him—after only one short hour!
Why was I so unwilling to believe his story?
How could I doubt he’d been interrogated,
threatened, beaten, tortured, jailed?
I who lived an easy, well-paid life—in free Hong Kong—
judged that he’d not been persecuted—back in Vietnam,
a place to which I’ve never been!
What do I know of communists—or communism,
or what persecution is—or even poverty?
When was I ever forced to take sides against my will,
live under tyranny, experience civil war?
When did I last suffer for my nationality, my race,
my social group, my faith
or my political opinion?
My Chief and others of the Board who went to Vietnam
on tours officially conducted—by communists (!)—
returned convinced that all his fears of persecution
were no longer justified,
as if time alone had mended all
and the regime had changed!
“Oh! Torture is relative,” they said,
“only a matter of degree, for everyone in Vietnam
is beaten up when held in custody!”
Yet, how was I so sure that all his words were lies?
How could he ever pass our acid tests?
Was I so certain that he only fled
from poverty, not persecution?
Had he not been mortified enough
for me to set him free?
Was my compassion so fatigued
that I denied him the benefit of my doubts?
“Oh!” I said. “I’d heard it all before from others;
he had been counselled, skillfully,
to fabricate his statement so it fell
within the fivefold definition
of what makes a refugee!”
Think! I forced him back to Viet Nam!
And who’ll protect him there?
Can the UNHCR check up
on more than two in twenty who’ve returned?
(and most of them were volunteers),
But—as I cannot now undo what’s done—all I can do is ask my
friends
who still adjudge those yet unscreened
“Please be more generous than I
and give them the benefit of your doubts.”

Hugh Walker (1993:45)

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1 Limbo is defined by the Webster Illustrated Contemporary Dictionary (Landau, 1982) as a place of
neglect or oblivion for unwanted persons or things; an unknown intermediate place or condition
between two extremes (i.e. heaven and hell).
INTRODUCTION

The asylum of refugees in camps is a crucial point in any refugee experience. After successfully escaping from their country of origin and obtaining asylum in another country, it is at this stage that refugees are faced with three “durable solutions” to their predicament—local integration, third country resettlement or repatriation—which all diverge from this point. The asylum juncture became an even more important stage in the Vietnamese refugee experience following the introduction of the Comprehensive Plan of Action (CPA) in 1989, because the preferred solution—resettlement—was dependent upon the outcome of refugee determination interviews and appeals.

This chapter examines the asylum camp stage of the refugee migration by investigating the experiences of a cohort of Vietnamese boat people in first asylum camps—both in a Philippines first asylum camp and some of Hong Kong’s detention centres. The analysis commences with the arrival of boat people in both countries and investigates the asylum-seekers’ knowledge and expectations of life in asylum. The chapter then examines camp facilities in both countries, which were often in stark contrast to one another. Finally, the chapter investigates the refugee status determination procedures implemented throughout the region in the late 1980s as part of the CPA, and which became a pivotal component in Vietnamese refugee migration.

LIVING IN LIMBO

The asylum of refugees has been labelled by many commentators as a “limbo” stage of the refugee experience. For example, Bousquet (1987:47) described how Vietnamese asylum-seekers in Hong Kong were living in a “state of limbo”, where they lived with their past and dreamt of the future. Knudsen (1983:170) discussed

2 The durable solutions available to refugees are dependent on the policies of the asylum country, resettlement country, and even the country of origin.

3 Bousquet (1987:34) defined a state of limbo as “an intermediate state in which one has exited the old but is not yet accepted elsewhere”.
Vietnamese boat people being caught in “the limbo state”, in a constant shift between hope and frustration that left them feeling forgotten and undesired. In a later analysis of living in refugee camps, Knudsen (1990:156) found that camp life represented:

A new period of uncertainty and insecurity. Each person’s future options depend not only upon the individual’s ability to cope and adapt but, to an even greater extent, on his or her connection to a third country ... The absence of friends and close relatives adds to the insecurity, especially for young singles for whom the camp sojourn represents a brutal separation; they find themselves in a marginal position with few reliable alliance partners.

Kunz (1973:133) viewed the asylum stage as a “midway-to-nowhere” point in refugee migration, as it marked the arrival of refugees “at the spiritual, spatial, temporal, and emotional equidistant no-man’s-land of midway-to-nowhere”. Vietnamese refugees caught in this “midway-to-nowhere predicament” have suffered from a lack of initiative and feelings of helplessness. Hitchcox (1990b:9) also commented on the feelings of helplessness among Vietnamese refugees in first asylum camps. Kelly (1977) and Liu et al. (1979) described the boredom and uncertainty of refugees in transit camps. Refugees’ existence in these camps was characterised by Knudsen (1983:170) as “meaningless, uncertain, waste of time, boring and passivizing”. Bousquet (1987:47) found that life in the camps revolved around waiting “for interviews, for news of their families in Vietnam or relatives already resettled in another country, to see the list of people arriving ... or for word that they had been approved for immigration. There can be no doubt that they found this stressful.” McDonald (1993:584) highlighted that the camp experience was particularly stressful on children, stating that “the longer children remain in camps, the more stressed they become”. Liu et al. (1979:75) also wrote of the “trauma of transit”—where refugees had to live through many uncertainties, survive considerable hardships and witness extreme forms of cruelty.

The sojourn in first asylum camps was described by Knudsen (1983:ix) as “a critical phase in the life of each refugee”. However, despite the importance of this stage, relatively little attention has been paid to this period of incarceration in refugee camps.
Stein (1986b:11–12) pointed out that the camp experience in refugee migration has received “relatively little analysis”, despite being a “potentially fertile research ground”. He argued that it is “less understandable, perhaps even irresponsible… [that research has not been conducted] in camps that have become semipermanent fixtures” (Stein, 1986b:12). Chan and Loveridge (1987:747) highlighted that although there is considerable interest in the initial trauma of separation and loss, and significant research on the difficulties of resettlement, “there has been little systematic consideration of what happens in between”. Knudsen (1983:ix) also noted that there is a lack of data available on life in the camps and this period has been “given too little attention in the evaluation of future adjustment in the recipient country”. In the aftermath of the Second World War, it was found that the experiences of refugees in refugee camps has a negative impact upon people and their ability to adapt to a new society (Bousquet, 1987:51).

As mentioned previously, the asylum stage of the refugee experience assumed even greater importance following the introduction of the CPA. Most Vietnamese asylum-seekers had to survive severe hardships in brutal and overcrowded environments while they waited for refugee status determination procedures (screening) to be carried out, which decided their future movements. In order to continue their refugee migration and resettle to the West, it was necessary for asylum-seekers to be adjudged refugees under international conventions by the asylum country. Successful applicants were then transferred to different refugee (or transit) camps while they applied and waited for resettlement to Western countries. Those rejected for refugee status had their resettlement dreams shattered, and faced further long periods of incarceration in the dangerous and inhospitable camps until they eventually agreed to be repatriated to Vietnam.4

Many of the tens of thousands of Vietnamese who fled their homeland in search of freedom in the 1990s had not anticipated the unfriendly and discouraging reception

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4 Small numbers of Vietnamese asylum-seekers were forcibly repatriated to Vietnam.
that greeted them upon arrival in the asylum countries. For example, several respondents said that they were shocked by their reception and living conditions in the first asylum countries—both Hong Kong and the Philippines. Instead of finding liberty, they were incarcerated for years in austere camps where they were generally treated like criminals or prisoners of war. Many experts have described the conditions in the camps and detention centres as abominable, and the treatment of Vietnamese as inhumane (see Davis, 1991). Amnesty International (1996:1) reported that asylum-seekers were harshly treated in refugee camps throughout the region, stating that “people have been shot, beaten, forced to sleep outside without shelter, and have had only partial access to fair refugee status determination procedure”.

Living in these asylum camps and detention centres was extremely difficult, both physically and mentally, for the boat people after 1989. The former UNHCR Chief of Mission for Hong Kong reputedly stated that “the infinite period of confinement has had adverse effects on the refugees, leading to frustration and deviant behaviour” (Lau cited in Bousquet, 1987:40). The camps were frequently dangerous environments, where people were often subjected to corruption, enforced prostitution, robberies, assaults, stabbings, rapes and murders that created very traumatic experiences. For example, Mayer-Rieckh (1993) found that sexual abuse and violence against Vietnamese women was rampant in the crowded camps in Hong Kong, while McDonald (1993) discovered that detention in these camps was a particularly traumatic experience for unaccompanied children, especially young girls.

Conditions in the first asylum camps varied from country to country (and sometimes over time), with each government enforcing different regulations and providing different facilities. Sharp divisions in camp conditions emerged after the introduction of the CPA. These divisions were particularly evident in Hong Kong,

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5 According to Michael Beloff, a QC representing four boat people before the Privy Council, “the periods of detention are extraordinary and unprecedented. No other country has ever detained people for this length of time, even in wartime, except in cases of criminality. Though they have not committed any crime, they are detained indefinitely and arbitrarily” (Wood, 1996:1).
where Chan (1990b:96) witnessed a two-track approach evolve: a firm and hostile track that implemented screening, custodial confinement in detention centres, and eventually repatriation, and a second “liberalised” track for those Vietnamese judged to be genuine refugees, that permitted employment outside the camps and education for children in local schools.

The following section examines the harsh conditions in limbo—at the Philippines First Asylum Camp (PFAC) and a number of Hong Kong’s detention centres. It recounts the experiences of a cohort of refugees in the first asylum camps and detention centres from their arrival in either Hong Kong or the Philippines through the screening procedures until they eventually obtained refugee status.

ARRIVAL IN ASYLUM

Hong Kong and the Philippines had the reputation for being the two safest refugee havens in the region. It was commendable that both governments constantly maintained the principle of non-refoulment and did not resort to pushing refugee-laden boats back out to sea, as occurred in some other South East Asian countries. They accepted and provided sanctuary to virtually all Vietnamese boat people who arrived on their shores. The contrasting geography of these two asylum states—the compact former colony and the sprawling archipelago—and the different levels of arrivals in each country, resulted in different patterns of reception for asylum-seekers.

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6 Article 33 of UNHCR’s 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees states that “no contracting state shall expel or return (“refouler”) a refugee in any manner whatsoever to the frontiers of territories where his life or freedom will be threatened on account of his race, religion, nationality, or membership of a particular social group or political opinion” (UNHCR, 1979:70).

7 Malaysia and Thailand were notorious for pushing or towing refugee boats back out to sea (see Frost, 1980; Grant, 1979; St. Cartmail, 1983; Wain, 1981).
ARRIVAL IN HONG KONG

Hong Kong’s marine police maintain a close surveillance over the former colony’s territorial waters for Vietnamese refugee boats and other illegal immigrants. Incoming refugee boats were intercepted by police vessels and escorted or towed to the Green Island Reception Centre. All boat people who arrived in Hong Kong after the 16 June 1988 “cut-off date” were issued with a tri-lingual “Warning Notice” advising them of the introduction of the screening process (Diller, 1988:21; Appendix 7). Boat people were told that, because they had arrived after the cut-off date, they had to undergo refugee screening. Government officials told asylum-seekers that they would probably remain on Green Island for one to two months, and then later be transferred to a closed camp where they would wait two to three years until screened by the Immigration Department. They added that persons determined to be refugees would then be sent to an open camp, while those rejected as refugees would have to return to Vietnam. After explaining the screening procedures, officials offered to replenish the boat with supplies of fuel, food and water, and allow the asylum-seekers to continue their journey to another asylum country. Apparently few Vietnamese took advantage of this option.

The interception of refugee boats arriving in Hong Kong was explained by Sau muoi hai, who arrived in the colony with twenty-seven other passengers on 7 June 1989. He stated:

8 Green Island is located on the northwestern tip of Hong Kong Island. It was a “first station or quarantine station to receive Vietnamese boat people”, replacing a section of the Kowloon wharf area which was previously used for disembarkation. It was managed by the Correctional Services Department (Refugee Concern Hong Kong, 1991b:59–60). For a more detailed description see Appendix 8.

9 The warning notice was written in Chinese, Vietnamese and English.

10 There was a wave of Vietnamese arrivals in Hong Kong in mid-1996 who claimed that they were en route to Japan to find illegal employment.
When we reached the sea border of Hong Kong, the Hong Kong police ship saw us from a distance and cruised to our ship ... There was a Vietnamese interpreter aboard the police ship and he told everyone that we were not refugees but illegal immigrants ... He told us that if we stayed we would be placed in a closed camp, or if we wished, we could continue travelling. We decided to stay. We had to agree that if we stayed we must follow the regulations set by the Hong Kong government. Before we were taken aboard the police boat we had to sign a document indicating that we were willing to stay in a closed camp.

Other respondents also mentioned that they were required to sign a document agreeing to stay in a closed camp and abide by Hong Kong regulations.

Boat people were taken directly to the reception centre, where they received medical attention, underwent quarantine procedures (delousing, deworming and haircuts), were given clothing from voluntary agencies, and two meals a day. Tam muoi tam described his arrival:

We arrived at Green Island on the night of 25 September 1990. All of our old clothes were thrown away. We were cleaned up—had a haircut, bathed and given a medical check. We were given food, clothes and slippers. The next morning the Department of Immigration officials came to make appointments.

Muoi chin said that when he arrived at Green Island they were given milk, biscuits, canned fish and canned peanuts. He claimed that this food was strange to him and his family, and as a result all his family got diarrhoea. He also claimed that after they arrived at Green Island there “was fighting between North Vietnamese and South Vietnamese because the northerners wanted to get all the gold and money from the southerners”.

Sau muoi ba’s arrival in Hong Kong was “very difficult and complicated” because so many Vietnamese were arriving at that time. She claimed that they were taken to a desert island [Green Island], where there were many refugees, and strict security. She said that they lived on this island for nearly one month, in very difficult conditions, and with “different” food that did not include rice.

Conditions at Green Island were so overcrowded when Hai muoi mot arrived that there was “no house or bed” for him. At times, the influx of boat people was so
great that not all the boat people could be accommodated on the Island, and alternative arrangements had to be made. Some refugees stated that they stayed aboard a moored ship for a few days, while others said they were taken directly to the newly constructed Tai A Chau camp. Conditions at these alternative sites were even more severe, as Chin muoi sau—who was taken directly to Tai A Chau—described:

The camp had just been established, so it lacked everything. If we wanted to have a bath then we had to go to a stream and wash. After several days we were taken to a floating ship—a series of useless ships tied together. There was no house aboard the ship, so we had to use plastic or cardboard cartons to protect against the sun and use for laying. We had two meals every day, but there was not enough water. We had to take a bath using seawater.

Mot tram was also taken directly to Tai A Chau, where he lived in a tent. He stated that it was “very miserable” there, because they lacked everything, especially food and water. Nam muoi claimed that he lived aboard a floating ship for seven days, where he lacked food and water.

It is evident that the large number of Vietnamese arrivals in Hong Kong in the late 1980s and early 1990s stretched resources to the limit, and there were insufficient housing and other resources to meet the influx. Overcrowding was a continual problem for refugees in Hong Kong, as is discussed in more detail below.

**Arrival in the Philippines**

The arrival of Vietnamese boat people in the Philippines was in stark contrast to the arrival of boat people in Hong Kong. Most respondents arrived on one of the hundreds of outlying islands in the Philippines\(^{11}\), where they sometimes waited weeks before being transferred to the asylum camp. The people aboard Hai muoi’s boat were given directions to the Philippines by men aboard a Filipino ship, and eventually landed on Manburao Island. They stayed on the island for two weeks, and were then

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\(^{11}\) Officially, there are 7,107 islands in the Philippines, and only 500 of these are larger than one square kilometre. Only 2,000 islands in the archipelago are inhabited (Peters, 1991:15).
transferred to the Philippines Refugee Transit Center (PRTC) in Manila for another two weeks, before finally being moved to the Philippines First Asylum Camp (PFAC) on Palawan. Another respondent, Bai muoi chin, claimed that he and his fellow passengers stayed on Kota Island for almost two months. He stated that because the boat group lacked food and water on the island, they had to transport supplies in their boat from another island.

Most refugees who arrived in the Philippines praised the local Filipinos for their assistance upon their arrival. Bon stated that when his boat landed “the people on the island welcomed us and gave us food and shelter. They contacted IOM\textsuperscript{12} in PFAC, and their staff came to the island and picked us up. The Filipinos were very kind. They gave us everything we wanted.”

When the boat carrying Bai muoi tam arrived at Manburao Island, the local authorities realised that the Vietnamese were carrying lots of gold, so they collected the gold and bought food. The group stayed on the island for twenty-one days before being transferred to the PRTC.

Only one respondent—Nam muoi lam, a forty-eight year old woman—claimed to have experienced any problems with the local Filipinos upon arrival. She alleged that after her boat arrived on Coron Island “some of the local men got drunk and wanted to make trouble and abuse the Vietnamese girls”. She said she felt quite happy when the group eventually transferred to the PRTC after a month.

The Philippines Refugee Transit Center (PRTC) is located on the outskirts of Manila near the Ninoy Aquino International Airport and was used to temporarily house newly-arrived asylum-seekers and refugees.\textsuperscript{13} Conditions in the transit camp were frequently crowded, especially at the peak of the refugee crisis. Mot tram bay stated that

\textsuperscript{12} International Organisation for Migration (IOM) is an intergovernment agency that assists migrants and refugees.

\textsuperscript{13} The camp housed refugees from Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos on their way to and from the PRPC and RRTC camps, and Vietnamese asylum-seekers on their way to PFAC.
many people who stayed at the centre thought the camp was terrible. He claimed that they had no idea of the poor conditions in the camp when they were in Vietnam, so that when they arrived in the Philippines the camp was far worse than their expectations.

Registration procedures were conducted upon arrival in both Hong Kong and the Philippines, either by immigration officials or UNHCR officials. Basic bio-data were collected and asylum-seekers were issued with registration numbers—which became their identification for their entire asylum life.

**FEELINGS UPON ARRIVAL**

Quite understandably, there was an overwhelming feeling of euphoria among respondents at successfully escaping from Vietnam and arriving safely in either Hong Kong or the Philippines. Responses to questions about respondents’ feelings upon arrival can be grouped into two categories of approximately equal size. First, there were those people who were happy to have successfully escaped from the Vietnamese government, such as Bay, who stated she was happy to arrive in Hong Kong because she would no longer suffer from the communist government. Similarly, Muoi was also happy when he first arrived in Hong Kong because he had escaped from the communist regime.

The second group were those happy to have survived the journey. For example, Hai muoi was overjoyed when she saw Manburao Island in the Philippines because she had thought she would die at sea. Ba muoi claimed that everyone on her boat was ecstatic when they reached the Philippines. They had been hit by a large storm at sea, and also thought that they would all die at sea. Similarly, Tam claimed that “the feeling of death” went away from her when she arrived in the Philippines.

Unfortunately, the feelings of joy experienced by many asylum-seekers upon arrival soon turned to sadness as they realised that the conditions of their confinement
were not what they had previously imagined. For example, *Tam muoi bon* said he became depressed when he arrived at Green Island, because the camp was dirty and not like his home in Vietnam, and there were shortages of food and water. *Chin muoi mot* was also “sad and depressed” when he was put in the confined area on Green Island. Instead of finding the freedom he was searching for, he was imprisoned with conditions opposite to what he had imagined before he left Vietnam. *Tam muoi tam* claimed that his “spirit” was terrible after he arrived in Hong Kong, because he was fearful of the fighting between Vietnamese gangs in the camp. Fighting between northerners and southerners at Green Island was also mentioned by *Muoi chin*. It was apparent from the interviews that many boat people quickly became disillusioned after arrival, as their visions of asylum did not materialise and they suffered severe hardships in the camps.

**KNOWLEDGE OF FIRST ASYLUM AND SCREENING PROCEDURES**

To gauge the extent of refugees’ understanding about the situation in the asylum countries before they left Vietnam, respondents were questioned about their knowledge of the screening process and their expected duration in asylum before resettlement. Slightly less than half (52 or 48.1%) of all respondents stated that they knew before they left Vietnam that screening procedures had been implemented (Table 6.1). The most common source of information about the introduction of screening was from foreign radio broadcasts—BBC, Voice of America and Radio Australia—which was experienced by nearly a quarter (25 persons or 23.1%) of all respondents before they

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14 Attempts were made in Vietnam to highlight the poor conditions in the asylum camps in the region. For example, UNHCR produced a film of the squalid conditions in some of the Vietnamese asylum camps and detention centres in the region, especially Hong Kong and Thailand. The documentary was shown on Vietnamese television in the late 1980s and early 1990s in an effort to stop/reduce the refugee exodus out of Vietnam. However, many Vietnamese apparently considered this to be merely communist propaganda. Another major source of information on the asylum camps was from asylum-seekers who wrote to family and friends in Vietnam from the asylum-camps. It is possible that they did not accurately portray conditions in the camps so family in Vietnam would not worry about them.
fled Vietnam. One of these respondents—*Tam muoi sau*—claimed that he heard about the screening process on the radio, but he did not understand what this was.

Twelve respondents found out about the screening process through friends or relatives living in camps in first asylum. Among these was *Chin muoi mot*, who stated “when I was in Vietnam my older brother wrote a letter from Hong Kong saying if I want to escape from Vietnam, I must bring all the documents to prove I was persecuted in Vietnam”. *Bon* also received letters from friends in South East Asian refugee camps, who told him “when you arrive in an asylum country, you have to be screened for refugee status”. He claimed that he prepared for this, and brought documents with him to the Philippines: certificate of father, high school graduation and birth certificates. Others, such as *Ba muoi ba*, were less prepared and had to write to their spouses in Vietnam to send documents to support their claims for refugee status.

### Table 6.1

**Knowledge of Screening Process when Living in Vietnam**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No knowledge of screening process when in Vietnam</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Knowledge of screening process when in Vietnam, through:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign radio</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>23.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends or relatives living in first asylum countries</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnamese newspapers or magazines</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends in Vietnam</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>108</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong>*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* May not add up to 100.0% due to rounding.

Source: Field study, 1994

However, not all the information received from people in the refugee camps was accurate. For example, *Bay muoi sau* received a letter from a friend living in PFAC at Palawan which stated that the Filipino government would not accept any more boat
people, and that if he escaped after the cut-off date he would not be accepted. However, in spite of this mis-information, he still escaped.

Five respondents became aware of the refugee screening process after reading Vietnamese press reports on the subject. For example, Hai said that he read about fifty-one people who had been forcibly repatriated back to Vietnam from Hong Kong. The article also described the screening process that operated in Hong Kong. Another five respondents learnt about screening from friends in Vietnam, including one person who found out about the process from a person who had been repatriated from Hong Kong.

There was a single case where the refugee found out about the screening process through his work as a lawyer in Vietnam. He stated that he knew that he would have to present his documents to obtain refugee status, so arranged for the organiser to take them from his house and bring them to him in China.

The principal expectation of asylum-seekers upon arrival in an asylum country, was resettlement to one of the Western countries (Davis, 1991:14). A Ford Foundation study of Vietnamese refugees in South East Asia (cited in Robinson, 1989:8) found high resettlement expectations among most respondents—both new arrivals and longstayers—with most believing that they could chose their country of resettlement, with the United States, Canada and Australia being the preferred destinations.

To further gauge refugees’ knowledge of the asylum situation, respondents in this study were questioned on their settlement options and how long they initially expected to remain in the first asylum country before they would be resettled. The survey found a high expectation for resettlement among respondents, with only two persons stating that thought they would remain in the first asylum country. However, the time-frame for resettlement was not so clear, with almost half of all respondents (48 persons or 44.4%) stating that they did not know how long it would take for them to be resettled after they arrived in the asylum country. Slightly less than one-third of respondents (31.5% or 34 persons) expected to remain in the asylum country a short time, i.e. less than one year, including twelve respondents (11.1%) who expected to stay
less than six months and fifteen (13.9%) for up to one year. There were also seven respondents (6.5%) who merely stated that they expected to remain for a “short time”. 

Bon muoi tam thought he would be resettled to a third country immediately he reached Hong Kong. Ten respondents (9.3%) expected to stay in Hong Kong or the Philippines for between one and two years, and another ten respondents for more than two years. Four respondents just stated they expected to remain in the asylum country for a “long time” before resettlement.

It is evident from the responses to these questions that many boat people who sought asylum in Hong Kong and the Philippines were unaware of the situation in these countries. Furthermore, few of those people who were aware of the screening process had an accurate understanding of the determination process or a realistic knowledge of how long they would stay in the detention centres and transit camps before they would settle. Most were unaware that they would spend years incarcerated in first asylum camps before they would eventually find their freedom country.

**THE FIRST ASYLUM CAMPS**

Newly arrived asylum-seekers remained at reception centres (Green Island and PRTC) for periods varying from a few days to months, before being transferred to other camps: PFAC on the island of Palawan or one of the numerous detention centres in Hong Kong. They remained at these camps until they obtained refugee status, when they would be transferred to refugee or transit camps, or until they returned to Vietnam.

Most first asylum camps in the region closed in 1996 after governments and the

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15 The major detention centres that operated in Hong Kong during the 1990s were Whitehead, High Island, Tai A Chau, Hei Ling Chau, Nei Kwu Chau, Chi Ma Wan, Shek Kong, Lowu, Yuen Long, Sham Shi Bo and Argyle Street. In addition, Kai Tak, Jubilee, Tuen Mun and Pillar Point were open centres for persons who obtained refugee status and those persons who arrived before the introduction of screening (See Figure 6.3 and Appendix 8).

16 A total of 7,640 Vietnamese remained in Hong Kong at the end of 1996, including 1,345 who had obtained refugee status. Of the 6,295 not considered refugees, 5,529 were screened-out under the CPA, and 766 had arrived after the cut-off date for CPA-screening—30 June 1996 (U.S. Committee for Refugees, 1999a:1-2). As part of the Anglo-Sino agreement on Hong Kong, Beijing insisted that there be no Vietnamese boat people in the colony after midnight on 30 June 1997 handover.
UNHCR increased efforts to return boat people to Vietnam through the Orderly Return Program (ORP).\(^{17}\)

**The Philippines First Asylum Camp (PFAC)**

PFAC is located on the island of Palawan, some three hundred kilometres south west from Manila (Figure 4.3). The camp is about five kilometres east of the provincial capital of Puerto Princesa, situated on a small tract of land sandwiched between the city’s airport and the sea. It is fenced on three sides and bounded by the sea on the fourth. PFAC was completed in February 1979 and initially had a capacity for approximately 2,000 people accommodated in eight zones. However, it was later extended with four additional zones (9–12) due to the continual arrival of asylum-seekers (Knudsen, 1983:35). Sutherland (1993:4) reported that, at the height of the

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However, Jean-Noel Wetterwald, the Hong Kong representative of UNHCR, stated there were 2,339 Vietnamese remaining in Hong Kong: 1,595 recognised as refugees entitled to be resettled in third countries (living at Pillar Point), while 526 stateless people (citizens of no country with nowhere to go) and 218 due to be deported back to Vietnam were housed at the High Island Detention Centre (Lau, 1997; Sprague, 1997). The only Hong Kong camps operating in 1997 were Whitehead (which closed in June 1997) and High Island Detention Centres, and Pillar Point refugee camp. In mid-1999 there still were 990 Vietnamese refugees, 590 Vietnamese migrants (rejected asylum-seekers) and 410 Vietnamese illegal immigrants (who arrived after 1 January 1998) remaining in Hong Kong (Hong Kong Government, 1999).

In the Philippines there were 42 Vietnamese refugees at the end of 1996, who were housed at the PRTC in Manila. In addition, there were some 1,400 screened-out asylum-seekers on Palawan. A local NGO—Catholic Assistance for Displaced Persons (CADP)—planned to transfer them to a new site in Puerto Princesa. The city mayor agreed to allow the establishment of a “Vietnamese village”. There were also 360 ODP Vietnamese remaining in the Philippines, after the U.S. government revoked their entry visas to the United States, generally for falsifying information (U.S. Committee for Refugees, 1999). In January 2000, Philippines Member of Parliament Heherson Alvarez wrote to Australian Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock asking Canberra to assist finding a humanitarian solution to a group of 200 Vietnamese boat people remaining in the Philippines (Aust urged to take Vietnamese refugees after decade wait, 2000).

Indonesia closed its last camp for Vietnamese boat people on Galang Island on 8 September, 1996. At the end of that year only 29 Vietnamese remained, most of whom had obtained refugee status (U.S. Committee for Refugees, 1999b:1-2).

The last Vietnamese refugee camp in Malaysia—Sunegi Besi—closed on 25 June 1996. There were 78 Vietnamese refugees still in Malaysia at that date—45 who had been accepted for resettlement and 33 still to be accepted (Maniam, 1996:1).


\(^{17}\) There were increased numbers of repatriations from all first asylum countries in 1996 (Figures 3.9 to 3.15).
refugee exodus, more than ten thousand boat people lived in the camp, despite the lack of facilities to house all arrivals.

Until mid-1994, residents of the camp were free to move in and out of the camp, and frequently travelled into Puerto Princesa to shop, fish, watch movies, or undertake other social activities. A 9:00 p.m. curfew was enforced on all residents, apparently to prevent late-comers disturbing other residents (Sutherland, 1993:4). However, camp regulations were tightened in August 1994. The free movement of asylum-seekers was stopped, and only a limited number of two-hour passes were issued each day. However, the mesh-wire fence surrounding the camp perimeter was in a poor state and did not deter Vietnamese leaving the camp without permission.

Security

Residents of PFAC, especially women and children, were very vulnerable to violence. Consequently, most respondents considered security in the camp to be very important, and favoured the strict control enforced by members of the Philippines’ Western Command who patrolled the camp. Seven out of ten PFAC respondents (29 persons or 70.7%) stated that security in the camp was good, as Western Command maintained a strict presence so that the camp was “peaceful and orderly”. However, nine persons (22.0%) considered security to be unsatisfactory, either because there was regular fighting between Vietnamese (3 persons), or because of complaints against security personnel (3 persons), or because security was not strict enough. Three respondents said that the security varied, sometimes it was good, other times it was bad.

Those who complained about the security personnel included Ba muoi chin, who claimed that “the security personnel repeatedly beat Vietnamese boat people without reason”. Another accusation came from Tam muoi hai, who alleged that the “police in camp were very severe and that they beat the Vietnamese”. He added that the boat people were punished very severely, such as being imprisoned for one week if caught sleeping outside their billet at night.
There were a number of recorded incidents of violence associated with camp security. A large protest concerning the lack of medical facilities was staged in the camp for almost two months from December 1993. The authorities attempted to quash the protest by bringing in marines. On 14 February 1996, Philippine police clashed violently with about 1,000 Vietnamese asylum-seekers who stormed out of the camp into the adjoining air base to prevent the return of eighty-four boat people. The Philippines authorities used water cannons and tear-gas and fired shots in the air to disperse the protesters (Amnesty International, 1996:1).

The two respondents who had been PRTC residents both considered security at the centre was bad. Nam muoi bon claimed that the boat people were always threatened, while Bay muoi tam said that there was fighting between those departing to third countries and those voluntarily repatriating to Vietnam.

**Camp Regulations and Discipline**

Most PFAC respondents (35 persons or 85.4%) answered that camp regulations were “good” or “strict”. They told how drinking “strong wine” was prohibited, and that if people broke the regulations they were put in the camp gaol. However, a small proportion of the PFAC respondents (6 persons or 14.6%) claimed that regulations were not strictly enforced. For example, Muoi lam said that “discipline was not strict, and there was no heavy punishment for those who broke the laws”. This was confirmed by Bay muoi sau, who asserted that “the punishment was not strong enough, so criminals

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18 A peaceful demonstration protesting the lack of medical facilities in the camp was staged in front of the UNHCR office from Christmas 1993 following the death of an asylum-seeker—Tran Anh Dung. The protest continued until 2 February 1994, when the protesters were ordered to disperse. A group of 300 asylum-seekers kept vigil in front of the UNHCR office, despite being informed that the camp administrator would use force to disperse the group. Three truckloads of marines—armed with shields and automatic weapons—arrived at the camp, and an unofficial report of the incident (Events of the Crisis in PFAC, 1994:1; Appendix 6) stated that the marines “beat whoever they saw—male or female, old or young”. After ten minutes fighting, the soldiers encircled the demonstrators with barbed wire to isolate the group, and assaulted any person who tried to bring the protesters food or water. The encircled demonstration site was eventually overrun by other asylum-seekers at 4:00 p.m. the following day. The unofficial report stated that more than one hundred asylum-seekers were wounded, including at least fifteen persons who were admitted to the hospital unconscious—seven of them women.
did not fear the monkey house”. Bon muoi ba claimed that there were no clear rules in the camp.

Conditions in the PFAC deteriorated significantly from mid-1994, according to Hai tram ba. He stated that all asylum-seekers were forbidden to leave the camp, except with permission. In addition, a limit of US$50 per month per family was imposed on remittances received from overseas. Any additional monies were banked on behalf of the person, to be repaid upon their repatriation. English, Chinese and French language classes were stopped, and the movie theatre and all shop stalls inside the camp were closed down. In Hai tram ba’s opinion, the authorities were making conditions in the camp more and more unpleasant, so that greater numbers of asylum-seekers would volunteer for repatriation.

A strict set of regulations also operated at PRTC, according to Bay muoi tam, which saw people imprisoned in the camp gaol for minor crimes, or sent to Manila gaol for serious crimes. Despite this, Nam muoi bon claimed there was considerable fighting in the Transit Center.

**Housing**

The thought of living in a thatched cottage near the beach on a tropical island conjures up pleasant images of life in a tropical paradise. Unfortunately, despite the ideal location, PFAC was not a tropical holiday resort. Former resident Mot tram bay claimed that there were about fifty houses in each zone. The two-storey accommodation units (known as billets) had concrete floors, with the walls and upper floor made of bamboo, and roofs made from palm leaves. The buildings were not weatherproof and leaked badly in the wet season. There were two rooms downstairs, and an upstairs loft area accessed by a ladder. Sutherland (1993:4) claimed that ten or twelve people would often sleep upstairs in an area about 1.8 by 2.4 metres, which was the hottest part of the hut. Hai muoi chin said he lived in a house that measured about seven metres by three metres, together with twenty-seven other people.
Conditions at PFAC were “terrible” when Muoi lam arrived at Palawan in September 1989. He claimed that the camp was overcrowded and the sanitation was inadequate. He added that “there was not enough fresh air to breathe”. Nam muoi tam was also shocked when she first arrived at Palawan because it was so crowded. She said:

I compared PFAC to Vietnam. I was not rich in Vietnam, but I was very surprised at the poor condition of the housing in Palawan. It was very crowded and there were many fleas. Many of the people who arrived there had no billet to sleep in, and had to sleep in the yard in front of the UNHCR office. If it rained during the night, then the people had to get up and run to shelter. There were many people in the billets, but they did not allow others to go inside. They were PA people—those who arrived before the cut-off date. After two months the government built new billets, so the boat people could have somewhere to sleep.

Mot tram bay was one of those who had nowhere to sleep when he arrived, and lived in the UNHCR or school halls until new houses were built. He also commented that the camp was infested by mice and insects.

The field survey questioned respondents about housing conditions in the PFAC camp, and the overwhelming consensus was that accommodation at PFAC was unsatisfactory. Negative comments about the accommodation were made by thirty-six of the forty-one respondents (87.8%) who had stayed at PFAC—mainly that conditions were crowded (61.0% or 25 persons) or very crowded (19.5% or 8 persons); or were “dirty and stuffy”, “in poor condition”, or “damp and moist” because they leaked when it rained (each response given by one person or 2.4%). The crowded conditions in the billets were most likely far worse than their previous living conditions in Vietnam for most respondents.

Only five respondents (9.8%) stated that housing in the camp was satisfactory: three persons (7.3%) claimed that it was not crowded and one (2.4%) commented that it

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19 It should be noted that respondents were asked about conditions in PFAC when they were at RRTC. Conditions, particularly housing, were better at the latter camp.

20 The field survey interviewed forty-three respondents who obtained refugee status in the Philippines (RS cases): forty-one had been interned at PFAC and two at the PRTC.
was good. For example, housing was not crowded when *Hai muoi bon* arrived in August 1990, because the house had just been built and there were only ten people living in it.

Both the former residents of PRTC said that conditions there were crowded. Long-time resident *Bay muoi tam* said that over 100 people lived in his building, which was divided into small rooms by small partitions that measured only 1.5 metres high and 1.5 metres wide.

**Food Ration**

Asylum-seekers at PFAC were provided with a daily ration of fresh food, that they cooked themselves on small charcoal stoves. Respondents were asked to comment about the ration they received, whether it was sufficient and if they purchased additional food. The vast majority of respondents were critical of the food ration, with thirty-four of the forty-one PFAC respondents (82.9%) stating it was insufficient. For example, *Bon* claimed that the daily food ration only contained enough for one meal and there was not enough for dinner. Therefore, he had to buy more meat and vegetables. In addition to food, he also had to purchase charcoal, oil, salt and personal goods like shampoo and toothpaste. He estimated he spent P300 per week (US$11) on food and other goods. *Nam muoi tam* claimed that the ration was particularly bad on Saturday, when they received only one small portion of meat to share amongst three people. In addition, three other respondents (7.3%) stated that the food was bad. This included *Bon muoi bay*, who claimed that the fish she was given was so rotten that she could not eat it.

Only four persons (9.8%) said that the ration was sufficient, although two claimed that it was "just enough for temporary living". The ration was sufficient for *Sau muoi bon* and his family, probably because there were five children—including two

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21 The food ration was similar to the ration provided at RRTC. See Chapter 7 for a full description.
22 There were approximately P27 to US$1 at the time (1994).
infants and two teenagers—in the family. Mot tram bay said that some respondents joined other people—especially families with small children—to share the food because the children did not eat much. He claimed that later even this was not enough.

Most respondents said they bought additional food if they could afford to, although five persons said they had no money to buy food. The amount of money spent on food varied considerably, depending on individual finances. One respondent said she spent P600 per week on food for her three-person family, although a more realistic average was between P100 and P200. Mot tram mot said that he paid P100 per week to have his meals cooked for him, and the cook took his ration and other supplies.

Some respondents stated that there were problems with the distribution of food. Tam muoi lam claimed that the shortage of food was partly due to the pilfering of food by Filipino staff and Vietnamese volunteers. This was supported by Mot tram bon, who said that he took several kilograms of meat for one official’s personal use.

Residents at PRTC were not provided with fresh food to cook because most residents were only housed in the camp temporarily on their way in or out of the country or transferring between camps. Instead, the PRTC residents—both temporary and long-term—were provided meal tickets that they exchanged at the kitchen. Bay muoi tam said that each resident was provided with one bowl of rice, one small dried fish and half an egg for breakfast; one bowl of rice and either one piece of pork or chicken for lunch; and one bowl of rice and either one piece of chicken, pork or fried fish for dinner. However, both Transit Center respondents claimed that this food ration was insufficient. Nam muoi bon added that the food was sometimes so appalling that he could not eat it.

**Remittances from Overseas**

There were few sources available for asylum-seekers to earn money in the camp. Consequently, many respondents relied on remittances from relatives and

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23 The rations were allocated for every person more than six months of age. A separate ration (milk formula) applied for babies less than six months of age.
friends overseas to make their stay in the camps more comfortable. Money allowed them to purchase additional food and supplies to supplement their meagre rations. Just over half of the Philippines-based (RS) respondents (24 or 54.5%) received remittances: thirteen on a regular basis and eleven at irregular intervals. The amount of remittances varied considerably, from the occasional receipt of US$10 to regular monthly receipts of US$100, with an average around US$50 per month. Nineteen persons stated that they never received money from overseas, generally because they had no relatives in third countries. Not all the remittances came from Western countries, with one respondent receiving money from a relative in Vietnam.

**Water Supply**

Restrictions were placed on obtaining water at PFAC, with each house allotted only eight minutes each day to get drinking water from the taps—irrespective of how many persons were living there—according to Tam muoi hai. Extra water had to be obtained from wells situated in the camp, but this water was salty because of the location near the sea. Tap water was used for drinking while well water was used for washing and bathing.

The vast majority of respondents considered the water supply at PFAC inadequate. Thirty-four (82.9%) said that there was insufficient water for their needs, while another two (4.9%) said that there was an adequate supply of drinking water, but not enough water for washing and bathing. Only five respondents (12.2%) said that the water supply was adequate.

Mot tram bay claimed there were often problems obtaining water from the taps, because “some gangs kept taps, and they made it difficult for others to take water”.

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24 The main means of earning an income in the camp was to open a stall and trade goods—clothes, food, drinks, etc.

25 There was a very large variation in the number of people supported by the remittances. For example, one of the respondents who received US$100 per month had six people in his family, whereas another person was a single person case. Similarly, a respondent who received US$10 every month had a five person case, while another was a one person case.
Mot tram bon stated there was always quarrelling and fighting at the taps because there was not enough water. Consequently, he never went to the water fountain. Both former PRTC residents considered the water supply adequate.

**Electricity**

PFAC billets were lit for three hours every night—from 6:00 to 9:00 p.m.—and only seven of the forty-one former residents considered this was adequate. Houses were not fitted with electric sockets for personal use, although some residents illegally tapped into the electricity supply. Both the former Transit Center residents stated the electricity supply there was adequate, although there were no sockets for personal use.

**Sanitation**

PFAC had "horrific sanitation problems", according to Sutherland (1993:4), as it attempted to cope with up to ten thousand people. She stated that open drains ran right through the camp to the sea, which made the shore look revolting at low tide. Most of the former residents considered sanitary conditions at the PFAC were "unsatisfactory". According to three respondents (7.3%), the standard of sanitation at PFAC varied, with some areas clean while others were dirty. However, slightly more than half of the forty-one PFAC respondents (21 persons or 51.1%) claimed that conditions were "dirty", "not clean", or "unpleasant". Bon claimed that the sanitation was "terrible", with only one toilet for every twenty to thirty persons. He added that there was not sufficient water in the camp to keep the toilets clean. A number of respondents claimed that it was difficult to keep the camp clean because it was so crowded, even though sanitation groups, comprised of Vietnamese asylum-seekers, checked conditions in every zone. However, as Bay muoi ba commented "some people do it good, others do it bad". Fourteen respondents (34.1%) considered sanitation standards were "good" or "clean", while one person (2.4%) stated some parts were clean, some parts dirty.
Health Care

Health care was provided to asylum-seekers by a doctor and nurse who attended a clinic in the camp grounds. Three-quarters of respondents (31 persons) found these arrangements satisfactory. However, the most common complaint about the clinic was that asylum-seekers had to line up and wait all morning to see the doctor because of the large number of people who were sick each day. *Tam muoi hai* said that he would have to wait from 8:00 a.m. until maybe 11:00 a.m. to see the doctor. If he was given a prescription, he then had to walk one kilometre from the clinic to the Western Command Army Hospital adjoining the camp to get the medicine. He was also critical of the Filipino doctors and nurses, saying they only came to the camp to get a salary and not to help the Vietnamese. Another three respondents also criticised the Filipino staff, including *Mot tram bon*, who stated that when he went to the clinic to get medicine he saw “a doctor working with a long face. I got a sick feeling about the Filipino doctor there. Most of the doctors did not give fair treatment to the boat people.” The other two respondents who were critical of the medical staff also stated that the doctors did not care for the asylum-seekers. Another three respondents complained that the medical staff only dispensed a small amount of medicine to the boat people.

*In Tam muoi lam’s* opinion, the provision of health care deteriorated after 1993. She stated that the clinic no longer operated, and the only health facilities were in the military hospital adjacent to the camp. She added that it was difficult for boat people to stay there, and that the medical personnel didn’t take care of them. Camp residents staged a protest campaign in December 1993, remonstrating at the lack of medical facilities in the camp following the death of Tran Anh Dung.

Education

One of the better attributes of the PFAC were the education facilities available to asylum-seekers, which were given unanimous approval by respondents. Non-government organizations provided English and Vietnamese classes to everyone in
the camp, with French and Chinese classes sometimes available. Respondents stated that there was an abundance of classes offered and they were easy to enrol in. Ba muoi bay claimed the education was good because they encouraged people who wanted to learn English. Classes were taught by Filipino and Western teachers, and even some Vietnamese volunteers from the United States of America. In contrast to the PFAC, there were no education facilities at the PRTC, no doubt due to the supposedly temporary stay of its residents.

**Vocational Training**

Non-government organizations also provided vocational training to the asylum-seekers at the PFAC. There were many courses available, including tailoring, embroidery, auto-mechanics, typing and home economics. Classes were easy to enrol in, and considered very good and useful by all respondents. There was no vocational training available at PRTC.

**Recreation**

All but two respondents reported there was a good variety of activities in the camp. However, recreation focused heavily on sports for the male population—football, volleyball, basketball and table tennis—with limited activities for females. There was a special sporting competition, know as the “Camp Cup” organised for camp residents. Movies were shown in the camp on Saturday and Sunday evenings. Asylum-seekers were permitted to go swimming and fishing at the beach fronting the camp and also to go into Puerto Princesa for shopping and recreation. Two respondents, who had been unaccompanied minors at PFAC, said they were often taken on excursions out of the camp. There were no organised activities at PRTC, only privately organised sports.

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26 Adults and children attended classes offered by Holy Trinity for Children, Youth Group School and Center for Assistance to Displaced Persons (CADP).
Postal Service

The postal service played an important role in the lives of most Vietnamese asylum-seekers during their stay in the camp. As noted previously, the exchange of information between asylum-seekers and refugees in first asylum countries and would-be refugees in Vietnam was a vital link that influenced the decision of many boat people to escape Vietnam. In addition, the transfer of money from friends and relatives in the West to asylum-seekers was a crucial lifeline for many Vietnamese. Consequently, the Vietnamese placed great importance on the effectiveness of camp postal services.

The PFAC postal service was highly regarded by nearly all the former residents interviewed. Over eighty per cent of PFAC respondents (35 persons or 85.4%) considered the service—which was run by Vietnamese—to be at least satisfactory. Letters were delivered to asylum-seekers daily, Monday to Friday, although one respondent claimed this had since been reduced to three times a week. Only three were critical of the service, including Bay muoi hai, who claimed that the service had previously been good, but deteriorated while he was there. Both Ba and Ba muoi accused the postal service of losing their mail. Three persons did not comment on the mail service, including Mot tram bay, who said that he did not know about the mail service because he never received any letters.

Summary of PFAC

An additional insight of what respondents thought about PFAC was sought by asking respondents what were the “best” and “worst” features of this camp. The overwhelming majority of former PFAC respondents—twenty-six of thirty-six respondents—considered the educational facilities to be the best attribute of the camp, with another two persons mentioning the voluntary organizations that assisted asylum-seekers and ran the schools (Figure 6.1). Language learning, especially English, was

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27 Thirty-six respondents stated a “best feature” while seven respondents claimed there was no “best” attribute of the camp.
considered a valuable tool by asylum-seekers that could assist their goal of resettlement
to the West. The provision of educational facilities at PFAC enabled very large
numbers of boat people to learn English to various standards.

Figure 6.1

Best Features of Philippines First Asylum Camp and
Philippines Refugee Transit Center

Source: Field study, 1994

Responses about the worst features of PFAC were much more diverse: fourteen
respondents considered the food ration and food distribution system the worst aspect of
the camp, closely followed by security concerns—which included fighting among boat
people and gangs in the camp—which were mentioned by ten persons (Figure 6.2).

The PFAC was an over-crowded refugee camp with poor infrastructure,
particularly housing, sanitation and water supply. However, there were benefits,
especially with the education and vocational training opportunities in the camp, that
received almost universal approval. Furthermore, camp residents were permitted
considerable freedom, being permitted to leave the camp—a rare privilege in most other asylum camps in the region following the introduction of the CPA.

**Figure 6.2**

Worst Feature of the Philippines First Asylum Camp and the Philippines Refugee Transit Center

![Bar chart showing worst features of camps](image)

Source: Field study, 1994

**The Hong Kong Detention Centres**

Vietnamese asylum-seekers seeking refuge in Hong Kong were housed in at least twelve detention centres and a number of temporary sites, including disused factories, multi-storey buildings, tents on a former airfield and occasionally ships, from 1991 (Figure 6.3 and Appendix 8). For example, Chin muoi sau told how he lived aboard a moored ship, before he was eventually transferred to High Island. Bay muoi lived in Sham Shi Bo, a disused factory that consisted of only one large building. The Shek Kong Detention Centre was formerly an airstrip, where over 7,000 asylum seekers

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28 Five old Star Ferries were moored next to Stonecutters Island and used as a detention centre until its closure in December 1989. The environment on the boats were horrific—they were very crowded, conditions were very unhygienic, and many people were exposed to the elements.
were housed in tents. When Muoi ba arrived at Tai A Chau they were no houses and they had to build small huts out of bamboo and leaves.

In later years, the majority of the boat people were housed in purpose-built, prison-like detention centres. Accommodation buildings were generally long Nissen huts constructed of corrugated iron. Camp grounds were expanses of concrete and asphalt, encircled by tall mesh-fences topped by razor-wire, with guard towers strategically located in all corners and manned by personnel from Hong Kong’s Correctional Services Department (CSD) and the Royal Hong Kong Police Force (RHKPF). These concrete and iron jungles were extremely barren environments, with no trees or grass growing within them.

Asylum-seekers in Hong Kong were frequently transferred between detention centres, and it was not unusual for a person to stay in three or four different camps during their confinement before they obtained refugee status. Typical of these was Tam muoi tam, who stated that he lived in many camps in Hong Kong and moved many times—from Green Island to Hei Ling Chau, where he stayed for one year, then to Whitehead for two years, Chi Ma Wau for five months and then to High Island for one year—before finally obtaining refugee status and transferring to the Regional Resettlement Transit Center (RRTC) in the Philippines. He claimed that the government’s policy of transferring boat people was aimed at getting the boat people tired of shifting, so they would volunteer to repatriate to Vietnam.

Because most respondents had lived in a number of camps, details were only sought about the centre where they had spent the longest time. Information was provided on Whitehead (twenty-nine respondents), Tai A Chau (eighteen respondents), High Island (eleven respondents), Shek Kong (three respondents), Nei Kwu Chu (two respondents), Chi Man Wan (one respondent) and Sham Shi Bo (one respondent).

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29 The term “Royal” has been dropped from the title since the Chinese resumption of Hong Kong and it is now the HKPF. However, this dissertation will refer to the former title, as it covers that period.
Living conditions in all the detention centres were extremely uncomfortable. Stephen Yeung (cited in Davis, 1991:122) claimed that camp conditions remained appalling, despite numerous visits by many leading humanitarian and refugee representatives and other officials. He added that "whilst the overall situation in terms
of human care is deplorable, such treatment meted out to women and children, in particular, is inexcusable”.

**Security**

Hong Kong’s detention centres were often extremely violent environments. Conditions in the centres deteriorated markedly, according to Davis (1991:20), following the introduction of the screening policy in 1988. He claimed this was evident in the “considerable unrest in the detention centres; incidents of violence; the reluctance of the Hong Kong government to provide adequate medical services, dismay—and increasing depression—among those held in the detention centres”. He added that there were heightened levels of tension among police, CSD, and the boat people and that “aggression and destructiveness became a way of life” for those incarcerated and those charged with their supervision (Davis, 1991:49).

The camps became notorious for their violence—both verbal and physical—with disturbances evident between boat people and staff and between the boat people themselves, especially between northern and southern Vietnamese. The antagonism between northerners and southerners was so great that the different groups were generally held in separate sections in the camps. Vietnamese gangs, armed with home-made weapons, engaged in organised crime, especially extortion, and enforced prostitution. Gangs terrorised the camps, spreading fear and anxiety among groups and individuals.

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30 The widespread violence in the detention centres is claimed to be the result of overcrowding, deprivation, differences of opinion, etc. It was also the result of Vietnamese gangs that operated within the camps, extorting and terrorising fellow asylum-seekers. The aggression and destructiveness from the RHKPF and CSD staff towards asylum-seekers was also a contributing factor (Davis, 1991:49–77).

31 There was considerable animosity between northern and southern Vietnamese in the Hong Kong detention centres. Southerners generally looked down on northerners, considering them ignorant, less educated, dirty, violent and “communist” (Mayer-Rieckh, 1993:66). Southerners were considered richer than northerners, and often brought gold with them, or had money sent from relatives overseas.

32 Redden (1995:92) claimed that many gang members were employed by CSD as “Peace and Order” members.
The general attitude of the police towards the Vietnamese was "hostile, humiliating and often outright racist" according to Mayer-Rieckh (1993:49). Davis (1991:49) maintained that law enforcement officers adopted "head-on confrontational tactics", which were met with reciprocal hostility by the anxious and frightened boat people, "who were resentful of the belligerent intrusion into their very limited personal space, and angry at the blatant erosion of the very fragile human rights base on which they were forced to exist". Amnesty International (1990a:30) reported "a continuing pattern of assaults on asylum seekers and subsequent intimidation of victims and witnesses in detention centres". They also maintained that allegations of mistreatment were much more widespread at detention centres run by the Hong Kong Police than those administered by the CSD. The 1990 Amnesty International report detailed allegations of ill-treatment by CSD and police at various detention centres, including Hei Ling Chau, Shek Kong and High Island. Furthermore, there were numerous clashes between asylum-seekers and staff at the Whitehead Detention Centre in recent years. There were also allegations that some camp officials enticed women asylum-seekers, especially those without relatives in the camp, into prostitution (Mayer-Rieckh, 1993:58). Women were generally too afraid to report such incidents, fearing that it could jeopardise the outcome of their status determination.

There were also been numerous incidents of assaults on CSD and police officers, such as the incident in November 1995, when "a group of Vietnamese migrants armed with home-made weapons threatened CSD staff on routine duty" at the High Island (north) detention centre (McKenzie, 1995b). CSD expressed their "grave concern about the possibility of staff being taken hostage by violent Vietnamese boat people" (Davis, 1991:218). These concerns were justified. In March 1996, a group of asylum-seekers at High Island armed themselves with homemade spears and knives and held a guard hostage for twelve hours in a bid to avoid being sent home (Hong Kong Riot Troops End Siege by Boat People, 1996). In another incident at Whitehead Detention Centre in May 1996, a group of fifteen guards was taken hostage during a riot in the detention
centre (Lau, 1996a:1). However, Vietnamese asylum-seekers responsible for the assaults on security personnel were generally not prosecuted by the Hong Kong authorities because such action would have delayed their repatriation if found guilty (McKenzie, 1995c).

Most respondents interviewed considered the Hong Kong detention centres to be unsafe, and consequently regarded security an important aspect of their daily life. A two-tiered security system operated in most camps, comprised of CSD or RHKPF officers and Vietnamese volunteers. The CSD were responsible for security in the camp, while a hut leader and “peace-and-order” volunteers were appointed to every hut, responsible for the security in the building. Respondents said that some volunteers performed their duties well, while others did not, so that security conditions varied enormously within the same section of a camp. Tam muoi mot claimed some volunteers overdid their authority. These leaders were in very powerful positions, and not accountable to the community itself. Consequently, extortion, coercion, bribery, violence and intimidation arose. Tam muoi chin stated that the security volunteers could not control fighting among the Vietnamese, and only the CSD could solve the problems. Chin muoi claimed that a small fight between two or three Vietnamese would be stopped immediately. On the other hand, if there were more than say thirty people, then the CSD would let the fighting die down before going in. Some external sources have also accused authorities of not preventing violence in the camps (Refugee Concern cited in Mayer-Rieckh, 1993:51). Amnesty International (1990a:31) found that community leaders in the detention centres would have welcomed “more effective and targeted policing directed at controlling the violent elements”.

33 Due to the difficulty of recruiting and retaining officers in the Correctional Services Department, some camps utilised Royal Hong Kong Police Force officers.
34 The hut (or billet) leader was responsible for conveying food, relief items and information to the hut population.
35 The “peace-and-order” volunteers were responsible for keeping the peace in the huts, reporting “trouble-makers”, and to act as witnesses in disputes.
Only eleven of the twenty-nine former Whitehead residents claimed that security in the camp was good and strict, while thirteen claimed that conditions were bad. In addition, five said that conditions in the camp varied considerably, with some sections good, while others were bad. *Tam muoi chin* thought that Whitehead was not safe because there were “a lot of bad elements in the camp” who were always fighting. *Tam muoi bon* attributed the fighting to the fact that many of these people had been in the camp a long time and constantly faced repatriation to Vietnam. Another former Whitehead resident—*Sau muoi sau*—claimed that security at that camp was “terrible”. He alleged many people became stressed or mentally disturbed because they lived in the camp too long, or because of the crowded and hot conditions in the camps. He said there were many fights between asylum-seekers, and even accused the police of allowing this to occur. *Chin muoi bon* also alleged that the CSD allowed Vietnamese “hooligans” in the camp to do anything they wanted. *Bay muoi bon* alleged that the Hong Kong government bribed some Vietnamese to destabilise camp conditions. He alleged they spread rumours in the camps and started fights among each other, so that asylum-seekers would volunteer for repatriation to Vietnam. These allegations were confirmed by another asylum-seeker in a Hong Kong report:

> The Hong Kong government closes its eyes and ignores the situation, stirring up and encouraging these fights. CSD also tries to get people to fight and rob so that there will be more people volunteering to go back. They want to prove that detention is a good policy because people fight all the time—they have to put us behind fences. They think that will show the international community that refugees are violent and fight and that the Hong Kong policy makes sense. (Refugee Concern cited in Mayer-Rieckh, 1993:51)

It is possible that the Hong Kong personnel guarding the camps were willing to allow disturbances in the centres and were reluctant to intervene because they wanted to encourage repatriation. However, there is no actual evidence to support this. Perhaps a
more plausible explanation is that they feared being hurt by home-made weapons 36 carried by some asylum-seekers or being taken hostage by the inmates. 37

At High Island, eight of the eleven respondents claimed that security was bad (Table 6.2). Several respondents stated that there was always fighting among the Vietnamese, and Mot tram tam said that some men made weapons for fighting. Bay muoi bay said that gangs operated at the camp, and at night gang-members, with faces covered, entered buildings and stole money from the boat people.

Fourteen of the eighteen former Tai A Chau residents stated that security was good and strict. Among these was Chin muoi ba, who claimed that there were only “small arguments” in the section for southerners that he lived in. In contrast, Tam muoi sau said when he lived in a section for northerners, he was always afraid of being robbed.

Table 6.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Detention Centre</th>
<th>Good/Strict</th>
<th>Bad/Not strict</th>
<th>Some sections good/Some bad</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Whitehead</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tai A Chau</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Island</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shek Kong</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nei Kwu Chau</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi Man Wan</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sham Shi Bo</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field study, 1994

The security at other camps also varied considerably. For example, at Shek Kong, two respondents said security was strict, while a third—Chin muoi—stated there

36 During a search of Whitehead Detention Centre later that month, 2,458 homemade weapons, including spears, clubs and saws, were seized by police (Lau, 1996b). A Jakarta Post report on the riot stated: “For years, Vietnamese youths have been renowned here for their ability to create handmade weapons out of the limited materials available to them in camps, and their willingness to use them too—not least on their fellow refugees, as well as on their warders” (Stockwin, 1996:1).

37 As stated previously, the CSD had expressed their concern that staff could be overpowered and held hostage by angry Vietnamese boat people (Davis, 1991:218).
was a lot of fighting between Vietnamese gangs. He alleged that the gangs were allowed to operate by the CSD, so that the boat people would be scared, get tired of camp life and then voluntarily repatriate themselves to Vietnam. One respondent said that Nei Kwu Chau was good, while another said it was not strict. At Sham Shi Bo and Chi Man Wan—a camp for single women and small families—security was very good.

The implementation of the repatriation programs caused additional security concerns in Hong Kong’s detention centres, with Vietnamese inmates frequently protesting against forced repatriation. Whitehead detention centre was the scene of the most violent demonstrations, ranging from rooftop protests to full-scale riots that caused injuries to CSD staff, police and the boat people and considerable damage to the centres. One of the worst riots in Hong Kong’s recent history occurred at Whitehead detention centre on 11 May 1996, as police and guards rounded up 350 boat people for removal from the centre in preparation for repatriation. The worst tragedy in terms of human costs, occurred during a riot at Sek Kong camp on 3 February 1992, when twenty-four Vietnamese were killed in a horrific blaze that swept through one hut within the camp (Inquest into Sek Kong Riot Deaths Opens, 1995).

The Hong Kong government reacted forcefully to the riots, calling in the Tactical Response Unit of the RHKPF or the CSD’s Emergency Support Group to handle the situation. These groups regularly resorted to tear-gas to restore order in the camps—much to the criticism of many observers. For example, on 4 May 1990 more than 100 tear-gas canisters were fired at Vietnamese within Section 5 of Whitehead Detention Centre following a search for weapons. During an operation in May 1995, which involved 2,248 police and CSD officers, some 3,250 tear-gas canisters were fired, some inside huts and directly at people, despite warnings that such actions could kill

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38 Rioting Vietnamese threw rocks and homemade spears from billet rooftops at police and guards. A rampaging mob of Vietnamese protesters razed twenty-six buildings, set alight to fifty-three vehicles, burned camp inmate records, and injured about fifty officers. Police retaliated with tear-gas, spreading an acrid cloud of smoke over the camp. During the riot 119 asylum-seekers escaped from the camp after toppling perimeter fences and storming the gates. Police seized 2,500 homemade weapons and over 1,500 stolen items in a search after the riot (Humphrey, 1996:1).
A year later, police fired more than 500 rounds of tear-gas to regain control after asylum-seekers rioted within Whitehead, setting buildings ablaze and taking warders hostage for several hours (Lau, 1996b; Leung, 1996). The use of tear-gas in such confined areas, especially among a group with a high proportion of children, is against the maker’s recommendations and has been repeatedly criticised and been the subject of investigations.

**Camp Regulations and Discipline**

Life in the detention centres was regulated by a strict code of behaviour, based upon United Kingdom prison rules and regulations, but amended for the Vietnamese in detention. Regulations included many discipline offences that could be considered petty. The rules were administered by CSD or RHKPF staff. More than seventy per cent of the former Hong Kong respondents (46 persons or 70.8%) commented that regulations and discipline in the detention centres were strict, although most persons preferred the strict regimes that operated in the camps.

Persons caught breaking any of these camp regulations were punished, with penalties varying depending on the severity of the crime. For example, people apprehended for minor infringements were often merely required to report to the security personnel daily, while those detained for more serious violations, such as drinking and gambling, were imprisoned in the camp gaol for periods up to twenty-eight days. Most camps also had “Maximum Security Sections” where “trouble-makers” were incarcerated for more than twenty-eight days. People accused of the most serious

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39 Davis (1991:57) reported that the makers recommended not firing tear-gas within confined spaces, and in the presence of people with breathing difficulties, and where young children are present.

40 Following an incident at Whitehead in May 1995, Refugee Concern labelled the use of tear-gas on Vietnamese boat people as excessive and unlawful, and warned that it could lead to death unless the policy was changed (Manuel, 1995:1).

41 The regulations included numerous discipline offences, including: “disobeys any order of the Superintendent or of any officer; treats with disrespect any officer; swears, curses or uses any abusive, insolent, indecent, threatening or other improper language or performs any indecent act or gesture; commits any nuisance” (Hong Kong Immigration Ordinance, Chapter 115, 1989 cited in Mayer-Rieckh, 1993:48).
crimes, like rape and murder, were imprisoned in Victoria Prison. They were sometimes, although not always, prosecuted under Hong Kong law. There were some accusations that many asylum-seekers were not prosecuted because the authorities do not want to interfere with a person’s repatriation.42

The gaol at High Island consisted of three cargo containers that had been subdivided into twelve cells, each capable of housing three asylum seekers. The cells were bare of furniture, so that those detained had to stand, sit or lie on the metal floor. There was no electricity or plumbing in the cells. The only lighting came through the openings in the walls from lights on the perimeter fences. Conditions in the cells were extremely hot during summer and uncomfortably cold in winter. Asylum-seekers were only permitted out for a brief period each day to wash and go to the toilet—at other times a toilet bowl was provided (Amnesty International, 1990a:46).

The little privacy accorded to people in the detention centres was regularly violated by unannounced police searches that were carried out in both a “degrading and insensitive manner” (Mayer-Rieckh, 1993:46). While asylum-seekers were forced outside, camp officers turned buildings “inside-out” searching for weapons and alcohol, frequently breaking asylum-seekers’ possessions in the process, leaving buildings in a mess.

**Housing**

The most conspicuous aspect of Hong Kong’s detention centres was the crowded living conditions that asylum-seekers had to endure. Although housing structures varied between centres, the accommodation was always crowded. More than eighty per cent of the sixty-five ex-Hong Kong (TC) respondents (54 persons or 83.1%) described housing conditions as either crowded or very crowded (Table 6.3). Furthermore, four respondents (6.2%) stated that there was no proper accommodation when they were first

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42 In October 1996 there were 667 boat people in Victoria Prison awaiting repatriation (including men, women and children) out of a total population of 795, in a structure meant to house 438 people.
transferred to the detention centres—two lived in shelters made of bamboo and leaves and another two in tents. Surprisingly, five respondents (7.7%) said that their accommodation was satisfactory: three said it was good, and two said it was comfortable. It is also interesting to note that four of these cases were discussing Whitehead Detention Centre—the most heavily populated centre in Hong Kong. One respondent just stated that the accommodation was noisy, and another merely stated “so-so”.

### Table 6.3

**Housing Conditions in Hong Kong’s Detention Centres**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Detention centre</th>
<th>Very crowded</th>
<th>Crowded</th>
<th>No housing</th>
<th>Satisfactory</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whitehead</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>26.2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>29</td>
<td>44.6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tai A Chau</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Island</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shek Kong</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nei Kwa Chau</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi Man Wan</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sham Shi Bo</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>17</td>
<td>26.2</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>56.9*</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Does not add up to 56.9% because of rounding.

Source: Field study, 1994

The most infamous of Hong Kong’s camps was Whitehead Detention Centre, located near the town of Shatin in the rural New Territories. The camp was the largest detention centre in Hong Kong, and accommodated more than 29,000 people at the height of the refugee influx (Human Rights Watch/Asia, 1997:1). There were 2,200 people living in twenty buildings in Section 1 at Whitehead when *Bay muoi bon* lived...
there. Asylum-seekers from southern Vietnam were segregated from the more numerous northerners in an attempt to reduce fighting between the two groups. At least one section at Whitehead was reserved for southerners, while Section 10 was reserved for asylum-seekers who had volunteered to repatriate to Vietnam.

The accommodation at Whitehead Detention Centre was expertly described by Bay muoi ba, who also drew rough diagrams to illustrate the plan of the buildings, and then produced photographs of his family living in one of the crowded buildings. He stated:

The housing was like a concentration camp—with between 2,500 and 3,000 persons in each of the ten sections. A high wire fence, with barbed wire on top, surrounded each section. There were twenty-four buildings in one section—each building measured twelve metres long and six metres wide and accommodated 108 persons. There were eighteen sets of three-tiered "bunks" in each building—nine on each side. Each bunk measured 1.8 metres long by 1.2 metres wide and 0.9 metres high, so you could not stand up. This area was for two persons. The beds are of metal construction, with wooden [plywood] floor. Between the top level and the ceiling there was only 0.9 metres. The walls of the building were corrugated iron material, sandwiched with insulation material. The buildings were very hot, especially during summer.

Another notorious detention centre was High Island, located in the eastern section of the New Territories. This centre housed a total capacity of 7,500 asylum-seekers in three sections, according to Chin muoi sau, with one section consisting of fourteen buildings, for southerners. Bay muoi bay claimed that High Island was "the worst camp in Hong Kong", a statement later confirmed by British prisons expert Sir Stephen Tumim. Bay muoi bay claimed that conditions in the camp were "hot and crowded, with 300 people in one building—an arch house made of metal". The estimate of 300 people living in one building was confirmed by several other respondents. A

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44 According to Refugee Concern Hong Kong (1991b), High Island had a capacity of 6,600 persons but this had already been exceeded by 1991, with a population of 6,750. It is quite plausible that Chin muoi sau's estimate of 7,500 persons was around the mark by the time he left the centre in July 1993.

45 The High Island camp was described by Sir Stephen Tumim as "by far Hong Kong's worst institution" (Smith and Batha, 1997:1).
number of respondents commented that the buildings were very hot, even with ceiling fans operating twenty-four hours a day. Temperatures during summer in the iron buildings often exceeded 40° Celsius.

A third large detention centre was Tai A Chau—located on a small island south of Lantau Island on the edge of Hong Kong’s territorial waters. According to Mot, there were 9,600 Vietnamese asylum-seekers in the camp, housed in three-storey buildings, with 240 persons on each floor in three-tiered bunk arrangements.

There is little information on the other four centres mentioned by refugees: Chi Man Wan, Shek Kong, Nei Kwu Chau and Sham Shi Bo. It appears that the three-tiered bunk arrangements were common throughout the detention centres—despite being in violation of international accords—with the only variation being the number of bunks in each building. The number of people in each building, according to respondents’ comments, varied between 100 and 300 depending on the style and size of the structure. It was typical for two persons to share one “bunk”, but if a family had a small child, then three individuals would have to live in this confined space. There was no room to store luggage or other personal possessions apart from the space on each person’s bunk. Family members often took “turns” to stay in the bunks in order to guard their possessions. Individuals hung cotton curtains around their area to seek some privacy, and also establish some boundaries.

There were a number of complaints that the buildings in Hong Kong detention centres affected the health of the asylum-seekers. Nam muoi mot stated that the buildings lacked fresh air, and because it was so crowded, and that almost all the people had lung problems [most likely tuberculosis (TB)]. This opinion was supported by

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46 The latter three were closed prior to field work in Hong Kong during December 1994.
47 Amnesty International (1990b:46) found that facilities fell short of the standards set out in the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners and could constitute “cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment”.
48 Tuberculosis is an acute or chronic bacterial infection of humans (and some animals) that spreads through the lymph nodes and bloodstream to any organ in the body, but usually affects the lungs. It is generally caused by exposure to the bacterium Mycobacterium tuberculosis (or tubercle bacilli).
Sau muoi sau, who claimed there were few windows to allow air to come into the buildings, even though there were many people. He believed this caused a lot of people to have health problems. Tam muoi bon claimed that all Hong Kong asylum-seekers “have TB because of that environment”.

**Food Ration**

Asylum-seekers in Hong Kong were provided with at least two cooked meals daily from commercial kitchens in each of the centres. At Whitehead, according to Chin muoi sau, Vietnamese volunteers in one section cooked for all of the camp. Almost three-quarters of the TC respondents (48 persons or 73.8%) found these rations to be sufficient, with another four persons (6.2%) claiming that they were just enough for survival. Two respondents (3.1%) said that there was enough rice in the ration, but the other food was lacking, while eleven respondents (16.9%) said the ration was not sufficient. It would appear that the food ration was worst at Tai A Chau, with seven of the eleven respondents critical of the food from that centre. One respondent claimed that “the food was not fit to feed a dog in a Western country”.

Bay muoi ba said a typical breakfast meal for adults was a glass of Halu-halo, two pieces of bread, milk and rice porridge. Children between one and seven years were provided with an egg in addition to the standard adult meal. For lunch and dinner there was one big bowl of rice for four persons, and one piece of meat—about 80 grams—per person and a few vegetables. The menu was different each day, with the meat either fish, chicken wings, beef, pork or “canned meat”.

Some respondents said that while the food provided was sufficient, it was strange to them. Another claimed that the meals were monotonous, while others

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TB bacteria, in its active state, in essence eats away at the tissue of infected organs, and may result in death. The disease is transmitted by the inhalation of infected microscopic airborne droplets formed during coughing of an individual with an active form of the disease. People who are malnourished or live in close quarters stand the greatest chance of contracting tuberculosis (American Lung Association, 1999:1; Dixon, 1993:1).

49 A drink consisting of crushed ice, sugar, sweets and milk.
claimed that they were not tasty. Many of the respondents bought additional food, vegetables and spices to cook with the supplied meals. For example, Chin muoi sau said that some of the meals were very good, but other meals they could not eat, so they had to cook them again. He said that the boat people were given charcoal to cook with and they bought spices or food in the camp canteen. Bay muoi bay said that there was enough food for him, so that he did not have to purchase anything. However, if he wanted to make the food taste better then he would cook it again, so he had to buy some spices and additives (especially monosodium glutamate).

The food provision at the Hong Kong camps was sufficient, according to Bay muoi bon. He claimed that “if you don’t have any money to buy, then that is OK. But if you want a comfortable life then you need US$20 per month (HK$150).” Three out of every ten respondents said that they regularly purchased spices, fruit, vegetables, noodles, etc. to supplement their rations, charcoal for re-cooking food, and toothpaste, shampoo and other items. Bay claimed that the food ration at Tai A Chau was insufficient, so he spent about HK$100 a week on food and other items from money he received from a relative in a third country. The average amount regularly spent was about HK$50 per week, although some respondents spent HK$150 per week.

There were fifteen respondents who said they occasionally purchased food or spices, when they had the money or if they wanted to improve the flavour of a meal. Almost half of the TC respondents (30 persons or 46.2%) did not purchase extra food, either because the ration was sufficient or they had no money or place to purchase additional food.

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50 At Whitehead, the Hong Kong government built an open kitchen in each section between two buildings so that the asylum-seekers could re-cook their mass-prepared meals.

51 Approximately HK$6.5 to US$1 in 1994.

52 Respondents in some other camps, such as Shek Kong and Nei Kwu Chau, could not purchase goods if they wanted to as there were no facilities in the camp, and they were not permitted out of the closed camps.
In addition to the food ration, asylum-seekers in the detention centres were also supplied with a wide variety of other goods, ranging from buckets and mugs to toilet paper and toothpaste. They were also provided with clothes collected by various charity organizations. However, Chin muoi sau said that few people received these clothes because Vietnamese volunteers had first choice and then hooligans helped themselves, which left little for the ordinary people.

**Remittances from Overseas**

Just under half of TC respondents (31 persons or 48.4%) stated that they received money from family and friends overseas and in Hong Kong to assist their living in the detention centres. Eleven (17.2%) said they received regular payments, while twenty said that they only received occasional payments. The average amount was about US$20 per month, although some respondents received US$100 every month.

Two respondents said that they received money from persons living in one of Hong Kong’s open refugee centres. Muoi, for example, claimed that he occasionally received HK$100 (=US$15.40) from his uncle who had arrived in Hong Kong before the cut-off date and was working in Hong Kong.\(^{53}\) Similarly, Bay muoi said that his friend from an open camp visited him every two weeks and gave him HK$100.

A number of adult asylum-seekers in Hong Kong who did not receive remittances worked in the detention centres for wages. For example, Bay muoi chin worked in the camp as a teacher and was paid HK$108 per month. Other casual workers, such as sanitation workers, were paid HK$80 per month.

**Water Supply**

Water supply at the different detention camps in Hong Kong varied considerably according to respondents (Table 6.4). It appears as though the water supply was best at Whitehead Detention Centre, where twenty-six of the twenty-nine persons claimed that

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\(^{53}\) Boat people who arrived before the 1988 cut-off date lived in one of the open camps (Pillar Point, Tuen Mun or Kai Tak). These people were permitted (even encouraged) to work outside the camps.
the water supply there was either good or sufficient. Former Whitehead resident Bay muoi ba said that there were public water tanks with about thirty taps for washing clothes and dishes and two taps inside each building, which all operated twenty-four hours a day. He added that access to water varied in different sections of the camp, and that it was difficult to get water in some sections. This limited access occasionally caused fighting between Vietnamese.

Table 6.4
Water Supply at Hong Kong Detention Centres

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Detention Centre</th>
<th>Adequate (Number)</th>
<th>Inadequate (Number)</th>
<th>Total (Number)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Whitehead</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tai A Chau</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Island</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shek Kong</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nei Kwu Chau</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi Man Wan</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sham Shi Bo</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>44</strong></td>
<td><strong>21</strong></td>
<td><strong>65</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field study, 1994

The water supply at Tai A Chau received fewer favourable comments, with half of the eighteen respondents claiming it was inadequate. According to Sau muoi hai, there were some problems with water supply because the authorities had to cart water to the small offshore island. At High Island, seven of the eleven respondents claimed there was not sufficient water, with two respondents stating water was restricted to certain hours of the day. Five of the seven respondents at other detention centres gave favourable comments on the water supply.

**Electricity**

Most of the former detention centre residents claimed that electricity was adequate and only seven of the sixty-five (10.8%) respondents claimed it had been
inadequate. One former Shek Kong and three former Tai A Chau residents said there had been no electricity supply when they were in the camps.\textsuperscript{54}

Electricity in the camps provided twenty-four hour lighting and ceiling fans. There were no sockets for personal use. At Whitehead, there were six lights—each with two 1.2 metre long fluorescent tubes—in each building. \textit{Bay muoi ba} said that it was dark at the bottom level, because all the lights were strung from the roof. He added that if people, especially those on the top bunk, could not sleep at night because of the lights, they would simply turn the tube to switch them off because there were no light switches. In addition to lights, there were ten ceiling fans strung from the roof of the iron buildings.

**Sanitation**

Overall, the Hong Kong detention centres received favourable comments from respondents regarding sanitation, with six out of ten respondents stating the camps were clean (Table 6.5). The best reports were of Whitehead, where twenty of the twenty-nine former residents said conditions were good or clean, and only three persons said they were dirty. Six respondents stated conditions varied, with some parts good and some parts bad. In Whitehead there were two toilet blocks for males and females in every section. Each block contained about thirty cubicles for showers or toilets.

According to \textit{Bon muoi bon}, Vietnamese camp leaders encouraged the asylum-seekers to keep the camps clean. Another respondent stated that the Hong Kong government wanted to convince the Vietnamese to keep the camp clean, so they paid Vietnamese volunteers HK$108 per month to work as sanitation workers in the camps. \textit{Mot tram tam} claimed that Caritas\textsuperscript{55} convinced the boat people to keep the camp clean and that people were paid a bar of soap or bottle of shampoo if they killed a mouse or

\textsuperscript{54} The lack of electricity probably occurred in the early stages as other residents commented there was an adequate supply.

\textsuperscript{55} Caritas is a Catholic relief agency.
The sanitation was checked daily, and according to *Tam nuoi tam*, a health inspector visited the camps each month to check sanitation, food, etc.

### Table 6.5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Detention Centre</th>
<th>Clean</th>
<th>Dirty</th>
<th>Varied</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Whitehead</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tai A Chau</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Island</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shek Kong</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nei Kwu Chau</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi Man Wan</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sham Shi Bo</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>39</strong></td>
<td><strong>15</strong></td>
<td><strong>11</strong></td>
<td><strong>65</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field study, 1994

The Hong Kong government also employed boat people at the other detention centres to keep them clean. All other camps, except Sham Shi Bo (one response), received more positive than negative comments.

**Health Care**

Medical clinics, staffed by a doctor and nurses, operated in all of the detention centres. In Whitehead, there was one clinic for every two sections. In emergency cases, patients were transferred out of the camps to hospitals, with helicopters used from Tai A Chau. These arrangements were considered satisfactory by fifty-nine of the sixty-five TC respondents (90.8%). The major complaint by respondents was that they had to line up each morning to see the doctor or nurse, which generally took a considerable time.

The high demand for medical attention was, on the one hand, a result of the overcrowded conditions in which the asylum-seekers lived. Skin infections, tuberculosis and other lung and respiratory complaints were extremely common, and there was a high birth rate among the boat people. Another reason to attend the clinics was to obtain medicine. As there was no chemist shop in the camps, drugs were always
in demand. Commonly prescribed drugs such as paracetamol and cough linctus became a currency in the camps, exchanged for cigarettes or other commodities (Solomon, 1995:1).

There was a high incidence of self-inflicted injuries among Vietnamese boat people. These were used as a means of getting out of the detention centres. Boat people allegedly injected themselves with raw sewerage, other potentially deadly fluids, or air so they would be evacuated to hospital. It was reported that fifty-seven per cent of boat people admitted to hospitals with self-inflicted injuries absconded (McKenzie, 1995a:1).

**Education**

Hong Kong’s provision of education to Vietnamese asylum-seekers was generally considered to be poor—in stark contrast to the Philippines. Respondents generally considered the education system was good for children, but inadequate for adults, as education in most centres was directed towards children and not adults, and generally in Vietnamese or Chinese, rather than English. Volunteer asylum-seekers were paid HK$150 per month by the government to teach children in the camps. A few of the adults studied English at night amongst themselves. Sau believed that the Hong Kong authorities “didn’t want refugees to learn English”. It would appear that the administration was not willing to provide asylum-seekers with educational opportunities that would benefit them in resettlement. There is no stated explanation for this prohibitive attitude. The only logical explanations are that the government did not consider any asylum-seeker deserving of refugee status, or that it did not want to provide any services that could act as a pull factor to asylum-seekers.

At Whitehead, there was an International Social Services (ISS) school for children that only taught a Vietnamese program. The school was located outside the camp, so police escorted the children. The children attended school for two hours per day, five days a week. Respondents such as Tam muoi tam stated the Hong Kong
government was very good, as they provided children with all the books and other supplies necessary for school.

However, Tam müoi bon stated that the education system for Vietnamese boat people was not good. He claimed that the Hong Kong government only provided classes for children under fourteen years of age, because the government was afraid that older children would escape from the detention centres. He added that the education system had been affected by the reduction in teacher numbers, as some had resettled to third countries and some had returned to Vietnam.

**Vocational Training**

Slightly more than sixty per cent of TC respondents (40 persons or 61.5%) stated that vocational training programs operated in their camp when they were there, with eighteen people (27.7%) claiming there were no classes available and another seven (10.8%) unsure of whether there were any classes (Table 6.6). The most common courses mentioned by respondents were tailoring, embroidery and typing.

A number of persons said it was very difficult to undertake the training classes. For example, Bay claimed that because most of the seven thousand people in the camp wanted to take one of these classes, it was difficult to enrol in them. A former Whitehead respondent, Bay müoi ba, claimed that only two people from one billet were permitted to attend a training course at the same time and there were only forty-eight persons in a course. Sau müoi sau said that only one hundred of the three thousand people in one section of Whitehead were allowed to attend training classes at any one time.

Two respondents stated that training classes at Whitehead had been reduced since 1992, as money for these services was cut. Bay müoi bon said that typing courses were only introduced in 1992, and there were only four courses held every year.

Some Whitehead residents, according to Chin müoi chin, were employed by Hong Kong business-people and paid a “cheap salary” for sewing. Another
respondent—Mot tram tam—claimed that the boat people produced cheap clothing and handicrafts for sale.

Table 6.6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vocational Training Classes in Hong Kong Detention Centres</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Detention Centres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whitehead</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tai A Chau</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Island</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shek Kong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nei Kwu Chau</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi Man Wan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sham Shi Bo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field study, 1994

Recruitment

Asylum-seekers in the Hong Kong detention centres were provided with a variety of sporting equipment by voluntary agencies, including footballs, volleyballs, basketballs and table tennis equipment. These sports were the main recreational activities for the male members of the community. Residents played these sports (apart from table tennis) on the hard asphalt yards of the camps, as there were no proper playing fields. Sporting competitions were often held during Vietnamese festivals, such as Lunar New Year and the Mid-Autumn festival. Singing and dancing competitions and other cultural activities were also held during these festivals.

Another major recreational pastime in the camps was watching television and videos. Each section of a camp was equipped with at least two television sets, which were located outside the billets, and managed by the Vietnamese themselves.
Postal Service

The postal service in the various Hong Kong detention centres was also considered satisfactory by more than ninety per cent of respondents (59 persons or 90.8%). There were a variety of reasons why respondents considered the system good, mainly because the mail was delivered regularly (usually on a weekly basis at all camps) or because their letters were not lost.

The High Island mail service was described by Tam muoi tam. He said that when letters arrived, authorities made a list of persons receiving “normal” letters, while those who received registered letters were called to the office over the loudspeaker. Chin muoi sau claimed that when persons received registered letters, officials asked them to confirm that the letter was not opened and sign for the letter. The letter was then opened, and the person checked the contents of the letter. If the person was afraid that their money or valuables would be stolen by gang-members in the camp, they could deposit them in the camp “treasury” until they were transferred to another centre or received refugee status.

Another benefit at the Hong Kong centres was that asylum-seekers were supplied with paper and envelopes, and could send one letter per month without a stamp. However, Mot tram tam claimed that the free postage had stopped by 1994 and the boat people had to pay for postage.

There were only six persons (6.2%) who complained about the mail service in Hong Kong, half because the delivery was slow or irregular. The other three respondents merely claimed that the service was not good, without stating specific reasons. Collins (personal communication, 26 February 1996) claimed that no mail leaving the camps could be sealed until discouraging printed messages could be inserted by camp police or corrections staff. He maintained that the Hong Kong government wanted to send a clear message to potential immigrants from Vietnam that coming to Hong Kong would be fruitless and that asylum-seekers would remain in prison camps indefinitely or until forcibly returned to Vietnam.
Summary of Hong Kong’s Detention Centres

Respondents provided a wide range of opinions about what they considered the best features in the detention centres (Figure 6.4). Education was again the most common response, although only ten persons stated this answer. This was followed by the food ration and security. A significant number of respondents (13 persons) answered that there was no “best feature” of the detention centres, which indicates the poor conditions in the camps.

Figure 6.4
Best Features of Hong Kong’s Detention Centres

The “worst feature” of detention centres in Hong Kong was security, which was named by more than a third of TC respondents (23 persons or 35.4%) (Figure 6.5). It is
apparent that the centres were extremely volatile environments, where crime and fighting were rampant.

**Figure 6.5**

**Worst Features of Hong Kong’s Detention Centres**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Worst feature</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mail</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No information</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repatriation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living conditions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No freedom</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanitation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Screening</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No worst</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field study, 1994

The detention centres were extremely harsh and unpleasant environments to live in. It is extremely difficult to comprehend how cramped the living conditions were, with 300 people living in triple-tiered bunks in corrugated iron buildings, with virtually no privacy, lights burning twenty-four hours a day (unless disconnected) and the ceiling fans making little difference to the heat. There were few activities for adult refugees to occupy their time, as they waited years to be interviewed. Asylum-seekers were subjected to violence, extortion, enforced prostitution and other crimes by fellow residents and treated harshly by the Hong Kong security forces that controlled the
centres. Asylum-seekers had to endure these conditions until they obtained refugee status, or volunteered for repatriation.

A report by Human Rights Watch/Asia (1997) stated that the Hong Kong government and UNHCR intentionally created harsh conditions in the camps to promote repatriation. This hypothesis was adopted in most other first asylum camps throughout the region.

REFUGEE STATUS DETERMINATION

The central component of the Comprehensive Plan of Action (CPA) was the introduction of consistent, region-wide refugee status determination procedures “to determine, individually, whether an asylum-seeker had a legitimate claim to refugee status on the basis of a well-founded fear of persecution” (UNHCR, 1995a:3). The CPA proclaimed that “the status of the asylum-seeker will be determined by a qualified national body, and in accordance with national legislation and internationally accepted practice” (UNHCR, 1995c; Helton, 1993:544). The CPA stipulated that:

The criteria for status determination were those set out in the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees bearing in mind, to the extent appropriate, the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other relevant international instruments concerning refugees, and will be applied in a humanitarian spirit, taking into account the special situation of the asylum seekers concerned and the need to respect the family unit. (UNHCR, 1995c:31)

The UNHCR Handbook (1979) was identified as “the authoritative guide in developing and applying the criteria” (Helton, 1993:545).

Vietnamese asylum-seekers throughout the region were generally provided with information on the CPA and screening procedures upon their arrival in the asylum country. However, Helton (1993:554) claimed that the leaflets distributed in Hong

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56 All family heads who arrived in Hong Kong were provided with a copy of a UNHCR booklet—commonly known as the “Blue Book”—which provided information on screening for asylum-seekers.
Kong rarely addressed the purpose of the interview or the definition of a refugee. The Lawyers Committee for Human Rights (1992:9) and Helton (1993:554) both stated that brochures provided to asylum-seekers in Hong Kong did not include a definition of a refugee as defined in the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol, and were devoted mainly to a description of the voluntary repatriation program. However, Chin muoi bay said that the Hong Kong government gave them a document about the screening process that showed “the five principles for screening derived from the 1951 Convention”. Muoi mot said that all arrivals after the cut-off date were given a small book explaining the screening process, while Tam muoi mot, who arrived in Hong Kong in 1988, stated that he was not provided with any information on the screening. He claimed that asylum-seekers were only provided with a handbook on screening after he was interviewed in September 1990. There was also a video on the status determination procedures produced by the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) that was shown to asylum-seekers in the colony (UNHCR, 1995a:6).

The majority of asylum-seekers in Hong Kong were informed about the screening procedures as soon as they were intercepted by police vessels, with over eighty per cent of TC respondents (81.5% or 53 persons) stating that they were told about the screening by Hong Kong police or immigration officials. UNHCR officials told two respondents (3.1%) about the screening, while seven people (10.8%) said they were told about it by someone in the camp. Three respondents (4.6%) claimed that they were not told about the screening.

Only those circulars distributed in Malaysia addressed the criteria for which refugee determination were based. The relevant section of the leaflet read:

The interview should establish whether your life in Vietnam had become intolerable through measures by the Government aimed at you personally because of your race, religion, nationality, political opinion, ethnic origin or your particular background. You are eligible for refugee status if the measures taken by the Government amounted to persecution, and if they affected you more than they affected the population of Vietnam in general. (Helton, 1993:549)

The five principles were “a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership of a particular social group” as set out in the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees (UNHCR, 1979).
In contrast to Hong Kong, asylum-seekers in the Philippines were not advised about the screening until they arrived in the asylum camp. Just over half of the RS respondents (55.8% or 24 persons) were advised by UNHCR officials at PFAC, with one other person being advised by an International Organization for Migration (IOM) official. A large proportion of respondents (37.2% or sixteen persons) were told by friends or neighbours in the PFAC camp.

In the Philippines, pre-screening counselling of asylum-seekers was only conducted by UNHCR, with NGOs prohibited from assisting. Vietnamese asylum-seekers had, according to Helton (1993:552), four opportunities to receive pre-screening counselling from UNHCR officials. First, upon their arrival at the PFAC, they were given a verbal explanation of the CPA and the status determination procedures, together with a written version in Vietnamese. Within two weeks of arrival they were registered by a UNHCR registrar, who distributed an information brochure. All asylum-seekers were subsequently counselled on a group basis. However, Bari (1992:498) claimed that counselling was on “form, procedure and criteria rather than on the substance of each case”. A pre-screening interview of each asylum-seeker was conducted by a UNHCR-appointed legal consultant to gather detailed information. Notes taken during interviews were read back to the interviewee, to allow asylum-seekers to correct any inaccuracies. The legal consultant prepared a pre-screening interview report after each interview, identifying facts in support of the asylum seekers claim to refugee status (UNHCR, 1995a:6).

Theoretically, all asylum-seekers in Hong Kong were expected to receive pre-screening counselling by a team of UNHCR legal officers. However, the lack of

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59 A registration form containing bio-data was filled out by asylum-seekers, with the assistance of interpreters (UNHCR, 1995a:27).

60 If the asylum-seeker agreed to the accuracy of the pre-screening document, it was signed by the asylum-seeker and sent to the Bureau of Immigration and Deportation.
resources\textsuperscript{61} and the extremely heavy caseload meant that few asylum-seekers received adequate counselling. Asylum-seekers in Hong Kong were permitted to obtain legal counselling from other sources to assist their preparation for screening interviews. Lawyers affiliated with JRS advised asylum-seekers on refugee law and the strengths or weaknesses of their individual cases. In addition, asylum-seekers were also able to seek private Hong Kong lawyers to assist their cases, although less than one person in a thousand used a private lawyer (Helton, 1993:555).

The determination procedures varied slightly throughout the region, but the process in each country included an interview stage, followed by a review or appeal stage where necessary.\textsuperscript{62} In all the first asylum countries, the refugee status determination process was conducted by government officials,\textsuperscript{63} who underwent UNHCR-sponsored in-country training programs and refresher courses. Teams, comprising at least one government official and one interpreter, were formed to conduct the initial interviews.\textsuperscript{64} Sometimes a UNHCR-appointed legal consultant was present

\textsuperscript{61} There were ten UNHCR legal officers in 1990 and fourteen in 1993 (Helton, 1993:554; Wolf, 1990:167).

\textsuperscript{62} In the Philippines there were three stages in the refugee determination process: reception, status determination and appeal (Helton, 1993:552).

\textsuperscript{63} In Hong Kong, officials from the Department of Immigration were responsible for refugee status determination. In Thailand, interviews were conducted by a team of twenty-five lawyers recruited by the Ministry of Interior to a task force, with other officials seconded from the Ministry of Interior. In Malaysia, a National Task Force for Vietnamese Illegal Immigrants (NTFVII) was composed of Army, Police and Navy personnel. Interviews were conducted by Army officers, with decisions and appeals made by senior NTF officials. In the Philippines, there were six teams of officials from the Bureau of Immigration and Deportation. In Indonesia, interviews were conducted by a task force (known as P3V), which was comprised of Army, Navy, Immigration and Police personnel (Bari, 1992:495).

\textsuperscript{64} The interpreter was usually externally hired, although a person from the camp population was sometimes recruited to translate (UNHCR, 1995a:5).
as an observer (UNHCR, 1995:5). Interviewing officials in all countries used the asylum-seekers casefile, which contained, among other things, a bio-data sheet.

The Philippines

Status determination interviews in the Philippines were conducted by a Bureau of Immigration and Deportation (BID) official, and occasionally in the presence of a UNHCR observer. The observers did not participate in the interviews, except when BID officials asked for their opinion. Interviewing officers had access to pre-screening interview reports, which identified facts relevant to and supportive of the asylum-seeker’s claim for refugee status, and were used to cross-reference information obtained during the main interview.

Refugee status was assessed by the BID officials at PFAC and then forwarded to Manila for signature by the BID Commissioner. A written judgment was then delivered to each asylum-seeker (see Appendix 9). In negative cases, the letter did not disclose any reasons why the determination was rejected. The Philippines had the highest proportion of positive status determination decisions in the region, with slightly less than half (47.25%) of persons granted refugee status following the screening procedures (Table 6.7). Persons granted refugee status were subsequently transferred to the RRTC at Bataan.

Asylum-seekers in the Philippines who failed the initial status determination interview had fifteen days following receipt of the rejection letter to submit a notice of appeal to the Appeals Board through the Task Force (TFIRAA), stating the reasons why

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65 In Malaysia, a consultant was present at each interview and submitted reports, together with an assessment of the facts, to the government on every case. In Thailand, Hong Kong and the Philippines consultants sat in on a number of randomly selected cases, and their notes formed part of UNHCR’s own files, that were referred to in discussions with the government (UNHCR, 1995a:5).

66 Asylum-seeker’s bio-data included date of birth, place of origin, family composition, education attained, occupation in country of origin and a brief summary of their background. The bio-data was collected by UNHCR in the ASEAN asylum countries and by government officials in Hong Kong.

67 UNHCR observers monitored interviews randomly in Thailand, Hong Kong and the Philippines.
the initial decision should be reversed in the notice. Appellants then had an additional fifteen days to lodge a detailed statement, along with any supporting evidence, concerning their appeal. If no appeal was lodged within fifteen days then a person’s “non-refugee” status became final and they were considered to have chosen to repatriate (Helton, 1993:553).

Table 6.7
Refugee Status Adjudication, by Country

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Country of Asylum</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Indonesia&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Malaysia&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Thailand&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>The Philippines&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Hong Kong&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive decisions</td>
<td>3,657</td>
<td>3,487</td>
<td>1,364</td>
<td>3,245</td>
<td>6,903</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Refugee status granted)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Decisions</td>
<td>7,382</td>
<td>7,362</td>
<td>5,063</td>
<td>3,622</td>
<td>53,390</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Refugee status rejected)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Review Decision</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>964</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>2,851</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Refugee status granted on appeal)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Review Decision</td>
<td>1,815</td>
<td>4,499</td>
<td>857</td>
<td>831</td>
<td>45,836</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Refugee status rejected on appeal)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup> Decisions as of July 1992
<sup>b</sup> Decisions as of December 1992
<sup>c</sup> Decisions as of December 1996

Source: Calculated from Helton, 1993; Hong Kong Government, 1996c

Although UNHCR legal consultants were stationed at the PFAC to assist asylum-seekers who wanted to appeal, they were not able to meet the demand for their services. Instead, those seeking advice with appeals were more likely to obtain assistance through an asylum-seeker self-help group, which had a UNHCR legal

<sup>68</sup> The Appeals Board comprised three government officials from the Departments of Justice, Foreign Affairs and National Defence; Social Welfare and Development, and the Office of the President. The officials received the same UNHCR-based training as BID officers. All appeals were attended by a UNHCR official (Helton, 1993:553).
consultant as a supervisor and adviser. In addition, lawyers from two non-government organizations—JRS and Legal Assistance for Vietnamese Asylum Seekers (LAVAS)—assisted persons to appeal (Helton, 1993:553). The chances of overturning a negative decision were slight in the Philippines, with only 8.5 per cent of appellants successful (Table 6.7).

Refugee status was granted to twenty-eight respondents (68.3%)\(^{69}\) following the initial interview, while the remaining thirteen persons (31.7%) were initially rejected, but subsequently obtained refugee status on appeal.\(^{70}\) The time-frame for obtaining refugee status varied between twelve months and thirty-seven months (average twenty-four months) for persons who obtained refugee status following the initial interview, and between twenty-nine and fifty-five months (average around forty-five months) for those who successfully appealed.\(^{71}\)

**Hong Kong**

Vietnamese asylum-seekers were interviewed by a Hong Kong Immigration Department officer with the assistance of an interpreter. The immigration officer collected personal data, which was recorded on a questionnaire (Appendix 10). A UNHCR legal officer occasionally monitored interviews.\(^{72}\) Asylum-seekers were unrepresented at the interviews and the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights (1992:10) claimed that few Vietnamese had ever spoken to a lawyer and that most asylum-seekers had "little information about the process and the standards for obtaining asylum."

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69 Only forty-one RS respondents in the study population underwent screening.

70 Two RS respondents interviewed did not undergo screening because they arrived prior to the implementation of the CPA.

71 Not all respondents could recall the exact dates. Therefore figures are only calculated from the 39 respondents who remembered the date they obtained refugee status.

72 Helton (1993:555) maintained that UNHCR legal officers were only present in about five per cent of cases.
Interviews were on an individual basis for each member of the family, including children, and sought information on the asylum-seekers'—or their close relatives'—length of service and military rank in the former South Vietnamese armed forces; length of confinement in reeducation camps and/or New Economic Zones; the loss of family registration cards (Ho Khau); and discrimination in education, health, religion and national military and labour services (UNHCR, 1995a:4).

Immigration officers forwarded their recommendations to their superiors, who made the final decision. Persons rejected for refugee status were informed of the denial—but not any reasons—and of their right to appeal. Less than twelve per cent (11.4%) of persons interviewed were accepted as refugees in Hong Kong from the introduction of screening in 1988 (Table 6.7). Only twenty-four of the sixty-five TC respondents in the study population (36.9%) were accepted as refugees following the initial screening interview. These respondents waited between twelve and forty-five months to obtain refugee status (average thirty-three months). Once a person obtained refugee status they were subsequently transferred to one of the open refugee camps in Hong Kong, such as Pillar Point, or to the RRTC in the Philippines.

Persons rejected for refugee status had twenty-eight days from the receipt of the decision to lodge a “Notice of Application for Review” with the Refugee Status and

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73 To reject an asylum-seeker for refugee status, the Immigration Officer would forward his/her recommendation to a Senior Immigration Officer for endorsement. To accept an asylum-seeker’s claim for refugee status, the Immigration Officer would forward his recommendation to a Senior Immigration Officer, who would then pass the file on to the Chief Immigration Officer for endorsement (Refugee Concern Hong Kong, 1991b:7).

74 The UNHCR contended that the lower screening-rate in Hong Kong could be explained, to some extent, “by the fact that the majority of the asylum seekers in Hong Kong came from north Vietnam, and usually had less valid claims for refugee status given the historical and political differences.” About two-thirds of arrivals in Hong Kong originated from northern Vietnam, whereas nearly all Vietnamese arrivals in ASEAN countries originated from southern Vietnam (UNHCR, 1995a:24).

75 As stated previously in Chapter 4, the RRTC was established in the Philippines as part of a British-funded program to relieve congestion in the Hong Kong camps. After some refugees obtained refugee status, they were transferred from their detention centre to RRTC, instead of moving into one of Hong Kong’s open camps.
Review Board (RSRB) (Figure 6.6). Appellants, or their legal advocates, were also required to submit a written statement on why the decision should be overturned within the same period. A copy of the complete Immigration Department file was provided to the legal counsellors and UNHCR once the negative decision was delivered to the asylum-seeker (Redden, 1995:40).

The lack of resources available to asylum-seekers in Hong Kong (and other asylum countries) meant that most appeals were inadequately prepared. Legal assistance in the preparation of appeals was provided by a small number of appeal counsellors from the Agency for Volunteer Service (AVS). The extreme caseload meant that AVS lawyers could only prepare submissions for between ten and fifteen per cent of cases. The remaining eighty-five to ninety per cent had to prepare their own appeals without the benefit of legal counselling or advice, unless they could obtain the assistance of a private lawyer. Wolf (1990:167) claimed that the critical shortage of trained staff has meant that UNHCR has “consistently failed to identify a majority of the strongest refugee cases”. And without legal counselling or advice, the RSRB frequently assumed that there was little merit to the case and invariably denied the appeal.

The RSRB sat in closed sessions, with neither appellants nor their legal counsel allowed to be present when the case was reviewed. It was “a paper review only” of the earlier judgement and written submissions, with no oral evidence presented, although in some cases asylum-seekers were reinterviewed by board members (Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, 1992:12). The RSRBs reviewed information contained in the Immigration Officer’s file, written submissions from the asylum-seeker or AVS counsellor, and further information, if any, obtained from visiting the asylum-seeker.

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76 The RSRB was headed by a former judge and organised into four, two-person panels of persons drawn from the public service and community at large (Helton, 1993:555). Each panel consisted of a Deputy Chairman (a public servant) and a Member (a lay member of the public selected by the RSRB). Panel members did not have any legal background or expertise with refugee issues (Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, 1992a:12).

77 Agency for Volunteer Service (AVS) is a local non-government organization created and financed by the UNHCR.
Figure 6.6
Vietnamese Boat People Arriving in Hong Kong after 16 June 1988.

Vietnamese boat people arriving in Hong Kong

H.K. Immigration (screening)

Screened in on 1st instance

Screened-out on 1st instance. All screened out will be seen by the AVS’s Appeal Lawyer for counselling.

Represented by AVS

Self-representation or private lawyer

Refugee Status Review Board

Screened-in by R.S.R.B.

Approved for resettlement by third countries (U.S.A., Canada, Australia, U.K., Sweden, Norway, Germany, etc.)

Interview and processing by resettlement country

Denied cases are returned to UNHCR for resubmission

UNHCR

RESETTLEMENT COUNTRY

Interview and processing by resettlement country

Approved for resettlement by third countries (U.S.A., Canada, Australia, U.K., Sweden, Norway, Germany, etc.)

Refugees

Non-Refugees

Repatriation

UNHCR mandate

Refugee Status Review Board

Screened-in by R.S.R.B.

Self-representation or private lawyer

Represented by AVS

Screened-out on 1st instance. All screened out will be seen by the AVS’s Appeal Lawyer for counselling.

UNHCR

H.K. Immigration (screening)

Screened in on 1st instance

Screened-out on 1st instance. All screened out will be seen by the AVS’s Appeal Lawyer for counselling.

Represented by AVS

Self-representation or private lawyer

Refugee Status Review Board

Screened-in by R.S.R.B.

Approved for resettlement by third countries (U.S.A., Canada, Australia, U.K., Sweden, Norway, Germany, etc.)

Interview and processing by resettlement country

Denied cases are returned to UNHCR for resubmission

UNHCR

RESETTLEMENT COUNTRY

Interview and processing by resettlement country

Approved for resettlement by third countries (U.S.A., Canada, Australia, U.K., Sweden, Norway, Germany, etc.)

Refugees

Non-Refugees

Repatriation

UNHCR mandate

Refugee Status Review Board

Screened-in by R.S.R.B.

Self-representation or private lawyer

Represented by AVS

Screened-out on 1st instance. All screened out will be seen by the AVS’s Appeal Lawyer for counselling.

Source: adapted from Hong Kong Refugee Concern, 1991a

304a
Refugee Concern Hong Kong, 1991:7. A case could be overturned by a positive decision by one panel member. The Immigration Department’s negative decision was overturned by the RSRB for just over six per cent (6.2%) of appellants (Table 6.7). Vietnamese rejected a second time were said to have received their “second chicken wing”.\(^7\) Twenty-six persons in the study population (40.0%) were successful with their appeals and had the original negative decision overturned. They waited between twenty-six and fifty-four months for the RSRB to grant them refugee status (average forty-two months).

Persons “screened out” for refugee status were eligible to apply in the Hong Kong courts for judicial review of the negative decisions in their case, although relatively few took advantage of this option. However, there were some successful appeals to Hong Kong’s High Court and the Privy Council in England.\(^7\)

The final means of review for persons rejected by both the Immigration Department and the RSRB was to petition the UNHCR to use its mandate to grant refugee status.\(^8\) UNHCR enacted this right most extensively in Hong Kong, where

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\(^7\) When a person was rejected following the initial screening they were said to have received their “first chicken wing”. According to Knudsen (1992:23-24) the key to this metaphor is that the asylum-seekers refer to repatriation as flying back to Vietnam. But a chicken cannot fly on one wing. When a person is rejected again on appeal they were said to have received their “second chicken wing”—a chicken can fly on two wings. If UNHCR refused to use their mandate to grant refugee status, this was considered the “third chicken wing”.

\(^7\) A landmark case was that of Do Giau, in 1990, who sought judicial review of the rejection of his refugee claim on the grounds that the immigration officials and the RSRB breached the laws of natural justice. (See Ten Case Abstracts in \textit{International Journal of Refugee Law}, 5:604–606 for full details.)

In February 1996, the Hong Kong High Court ordered the release of 11 Vietnamese asylum-seekers from detention on the grounds that the four applicants and their family members had no reasonable prospect of returning to their home country, making their continued detention in Hong Kong pending deportation illegal. The advocacy group Refugee Concern had lodged writs of \textit{habeas corpus} arguing their indefinite detention without being charged with any crime was unreasonable and illegal.

In March 1996, fifteen boat people, all ethnic Chinese from Vietnam, were released following a Privy Council decision in London. It was the first civil \textit{habeas corpus} case—the determination of whether a person’s detention is lawful—from Hong Kong to go to the Privy Council (Batha, 1996a:1).

\(^8\) In all CPA countries, the final decision on refugee status lay with UNHCR. If agreement on the status decision could not be reached, UNHCR had the option to exercise its mandate. That is, “in a case that UNHCR considered meritorious but which the government finally rejected, UNHCR was able to recognise the person as a refugee under its own mandate, and UNHCR’s decision was respected by the government” (UNHCR, 1995a:11). “The use of the mandate was to guarantee that
1,567 people were determined as refugees under the UNHCR’s mandate (Hong Kong Government, 1996:3). In the study population, two respondents rejected by the Immigration Department and the RSRB successfully petitioned UNHCR to use their mandate to grant them refugee status.

There was another avenue to obtaining refugee status after initially being rejected: through marriage. In the study population thirteen respondents (20%) obtained refugee status through marriage to a refugee: two persons married before they were even interviewed by the Immigration Department and eleven people married after being rejected, including five persons after they were rejected by the RSRB. One of these cases involved the marriage of a young woman to a Vietnamese man already resettled to Australia—arranged by her relatives in Australia—and the remainder were to refugees in Hong Kong.

In Mayer-Rieckh’s (1993:63) opinion, these “marriages of convenience,” which were usually based on money and family connections—increased as the number of persons screened-out increased. She stated that the preferable (and most expensive) option was marriage to an overseas citizen, with Hong Kong citizens a less desirable, and less expensive, choice. The third option was marriage to a person who had

any person in need of protection would not be returned to the country of origin against his or her will” (Bari, 1992:508). In Hong Kong, for example, the UNHCR established the Mandate Review Board, under the authority of the Assistant Chief of Mission in charge of the Legal Section. Submissions by AVS counsellors, private lawyers, relatives of asylum-seekers and even the asylum-seekers themselves were presented to the Board, which then decided whether an individual was a refugee falling within the definition of the Convention. Those who fulfilled the Convention’s criteria were “mandated in” (Refugee Concern Hong Kong, 1991b:7).

The UNHCR claimed it used its mandate most extensively in Hong Kong because it was not involved in the actual decision-making process. In contrast, it did not need to exercise its mandate as frequently in the ASEAN asylum countries “because of the prominence already given to UNHCR’s views in the national procedures.” In the Philippines, UNHCR mandated 19 persons (UNHCR, 1995a:11).

See Redden (1995) for a full discussion of “marriages of convenience” among Vietnamese women in Hong Kong.

Redden (1995:107) claimed that marriages based solely on money between third country citizens and Vietnamese women could cost up to US$5,000.

According to Mayer-Rieckh (1993:63), the average price paid for an arranged marriage with an overseas husband was US$5,000–$6,000, and between US$3,000 and $4,000 for a Hong Kong
refugee status, or had a high probability of being screened in.\textsuperscript{85} It has been suggested that the costs involved in marrying could be up to HK$50,000 to marry a male refugee and up to HK$120,000 to marry a female refugee (Redden, 1995:87).\textsuperscript{86} Mayer-Rieckh (1993:63) claimed that “extensive profiles of female Vietnamese asylum-seekers” were circulated inside the open camps, and among the local Chinese community. Refugees from the open camps usually operated as go-betweens. Redden (1995:31) noted an increase in marriages to Hong Kong residents and a decline in marriages to Vietnamese refugees between 1992 and 1993. She argued that one possible explanation for this was the “apparent shortage of eligible Vietnamese men” (Redden, 1995:31).\textsuperscript{87} It is obvious that if all else fails, marriage was an option for refugee status in Hong Kong, and to a lesser extent, in the Philippines.\textsuperscript{88}

\textbf{CRITICISMS OF THE SCREENING PROCESS}

Screening procedures throughout the region, but particularly in Hong Kong, were severely criticised by numerous commentators. Davis (1991:17–20) claimed that

\begin{itemize}
\item Chinese citizen. She also noted that there had been an increase in the number of female asylum-seekers marrying camp officials.
\item Persons with a higher probability of being screened in were those with a strong association with the previous South Vietnamese government, or who had an extensive record of persecution at the hands of the communists.
\item The lower cost to secure marriage with a male refugee was because there was a greater supply of refugee men to choose from than refugee women. Sometimes, less money was paid if the woman agreed to live with their husbands (Redden, 1995:88).
\item Redden (1995:31) claimed that UNHCR Family Reunion Records in May 1994 revealed that there were only about “53 Vietnamese male refugees eligible for marriage in Hong Kong”.
\item The situation was not as lenient in the Philippines. A person had to marry a refugee before the outcome of any appeal was handed down. For example, \textit{Hai tram mot} was rejected for refugee status so he married his cousin, who had already obtained refugee status, before his appeal and was consequently granted refugee status. In another case, a young woman—\textit{Hai tram nam}—married the same day that her (negative) appeal decision was handed down. The authorities refused to grant her refugee status. She had a baby with her refugee husband and the baby was granted refugee status. The husband resettled, while the mother and child remained in the camp. The child is eligible for resettlement, but the mother is not. Marriages for refugee status were generally known as “Palawan marriages”, and were quite common. Some couples attempted to maintain the facade of marriage, while others did not even attempt to disguise the purpose of the marriage, and did not even live together. One refugee woman at the RRTC asked about Australia’s divorce laws, and how easy it would be to divorce from her husband after resettling.
\end{itemize}
the introduction of screening was “ill-conceived, ill-timed and ill-prepared” and was “a panic reaction to the increasing number of arrivals”. This is also supported by Mushkat (1989:475), who claimed that screening was a “another ad hoc step, designed to accommodate domestic pressures and serve as a deterrent short of abolishing Hong Kong’s status as a ‘country of first asylum’”. Wolf (1990:162) labelled the screening procedures in Hong Kong as “a ruse designed not to identify genuine refugees, but to deny refugee status in as many cases as is necessary to ‘solve’ the boat people problem”. He argued that the purpose of the screening was to discourage the flow of Vietnamese into Hong Kong rather than identify which of the boat people were truly entitled to international protection (Wolf, 1990:163). He noted that international human rights groups such as Amnesty International and the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights had identified numerous “critical flaws” in Hong Kong’s screening procedures.

Chin muoi tam thought that “the Hong Kong government had a policy of intentionally rejecting boat people to prevent them from becoming refugees and resettling”. Collins (personal communication, 22nd February 1996) also believed that there was considerable political pressure to “screen out” thousands of people in a short period of time. He stated “that it was clearly the mission of the Hong Kong government (and I suspect the UNHCR) to return most of the asylum seekers”. He further contended that the screening was a clear policy to send a message to potential immigrants from

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89 According to Mushkat (1989:475), a survey conducted by the South China Morning Post reported that 85 per cent of Hong Kong residents wanted to send new arrivals back to sea. Davis (1991:138) also reported that public opinion was overwhelmingly against the Vietnamese and there was widespread anti-Vietnamese sentiment. Public opinion in Hong Kong turned dramatically against the Vietnamese following violent riots at the Whitehead detention centre in 1996, which left much of the camp in ruins and dozens of policemen and prison officers injured (HK strengthens law to keep boatpeople in detention, 1996:1).

90 Among the “critical flaws” identified in the screening procedures were:

- Inadequate notice; lack of adequate legal advice and assistance; denial of the right to have counsel present during the screening interview; biased and incompetent immigration officers; incompetent and poorly trained interpreters; failure to provide an accurate interview record; failure to adequately inform asylum-seekers of the reasons for the denial of their claims; and appeals conducted in closed session by a panel composed mainly of lay persons; ...[and the] failure to make provision for the submission of written representations prior to the interview. (Wolf, 1990:163)
Vietnam, that coming to Hong Kong would be fruitless and that they would remain in prison camps indefinitely or until forcibly returned to Vietnam.

The negative attitude of the Hong Kong government is also reflected in their policy. Although the UNHCR considered all Vietnamese arrivals to be asylum-seekers unless determined otherwise, the Hong Kong government considered them all illegal immigrants until proved differently (Mushkat, 1989:474).

Mushkat (1989:465–466) was critical of UNHCR guidelines used in the screening procedures, claiming the UNHCR Handbook was prepared “to facilitate the application of the criteria adopted in the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol, which in turn embody standards and classifications geared towards European and other Western refugees”. The Euro-centric bias of the screening instruments was also noted by Collins (personal communication, 26 February 1996), who claimed that the questionnaire used in screening was highly mechanical, excessively long and detailed, repetitive, vague and worded in an accusative manner. He argued that it had been drafted by a team of barristers in Geneva who clearly “knew little, if anything, of Vietnamese people, culture, family characteristics, occupations, education or typical family histories”.

Mushkat (1989:475–476) stated that it was “unreasonable and unfair” for the asylum-seekers to “articulate a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion” considering their ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds. She argued that most arrivals were inclined to “emphasize the economic aspects of their plight” because they lacked

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91 The UNHCR Handbook (UNHCR, 1979) was produced to provide guidance to government officials concerned with the determination of refugee status in various states. It provides the general definition of who is (and who is not) a refugee from the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees. In addition, it details the criteria to be used in the determination of refugee status, such as persecution, discrimination, punishment, race, religion, nationality, membership of particular social group, and political opinion.

92 The 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees was a European-orientated document as its definition of refugees was restricted to refugees in Europe following the end of the Second World War. The geographical and chronological limitations were removed in the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees to make the definition more general (Reed et al., 1998:3).
the “verbal and intellectual skills required to communicate in politically sophisticated terms”. This point was made by Hai muoi tam, a Chinese-Vietnamese respondent, who claimed that he did not possess the language to explain his difficult life in Vietnam to the appeal board.

Screening interviews were criticised from many sources. For example, Collins (personal communication, 26 February 1996) claimed that the lines of examination were frequently inconsistent and that interviewers searched for gaps in information, inconsistencies in responses regarding family histories or other issues from one family member to the next. Bay muoi chin thought that the interviewer attempted to trap him by asking lots of questions. The interviewer in Tam muoi bon’s interview only asked “yes/no” questions, so that he did not have time to provide detailed answers and could not describe all the events that he suffered in Vietnam. Nam muoi hai also complained that the interviewing officer did not allow him sufficient time to talk, so he could not clearly explain his life in Vietnam. These claims are supported by Amnesty International (1990a:19), which found

Immigration Officers cutting short potentially relevant responses or insisting on “yes/no” responses to questions where explanations were required, by failing to ask important follow-up questions, by failing to take note of important elements in responses and by drawing unwarranted simplistic conclusions regarding the alleged economic motivation of asylum seekers.

Collins, who is fluent in Vietnamese, personally witnessed immigration officers ask questions for which the respondent could have no possible knowledge. Many respondents were fearful at not responding and out of fear, often gave the appearance of lying. He argued that there was a bias against farmers, fishermen, tradespeople and youth, whom it was thought had no possible case for claiming political or religious persecution (Collins, personal communication, 26 February 1996).

Wolf’s (1990) work with asylum-seekers in Hong Kong revealed numerous errors during interviews, including “patently obvious errors in transcription, responses deliberately distorted or invented to weaken the applicants’ persecution claims, and
answers recorded to questions which were never asked”.93 Collins (personal communication, 26 February 1996) also witnessed interviewers ask questions that were different from those given in the document. *Nam muoi chin* was rejected for refugee status by immigration officials in Hong Kong. He was assisted in preparing his appeal by lawyers from the JRS and the UNHCR who rejected what the Immigration Department officers had written during his interview. *Sau muoi nam* claimed that his interpreter was Chinese, who did not understand much Vietnamese, and did not transcribe exactly what was claimed and he was subsequently rejected for refugee status.94

Wolf (1990:163) claimed that Hong Kong’s Immigration Department has “consistently and erroneously denied compelling claims to refugee status, both by accident and design”. The consistency and similarity of complaints about screening interviews led him to believe that immigration officers had been encouraged by their superiors “to deny claims to refugee status systematically and regardless of merit”.

Immigration officials, especially in Hong Kong, were severely criticised for their role in the determination process. Mushkat (1989:476) argued that Hong Kong’s immigration authorities were not equipped to “undertake complex inquiries into the background and motives of asylum seekers from Vietnam”. Amnesty International (1990a:20) argued that some Immigration Officers lacked sufficient understanding of the basic standards of international migration law that they were meant to be applying.

A number of commentators, including Amnesty International (1990a:19), Mushkat (1993:567) and Wolf (1990:167), found that many immigration officers were ignorant of the conditions in Vietnam. They argued that some officers lacked sufficient

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93 The most notable case of deception involved Nguyen Manh Hung, who was denied refugee status on grounds of credibility and subsequently filed a case to be heard before the Hong Kong Supreme Court. However, the application was reversed before the case went to court after it was disclosed that Nguyen Manh Hung had secretly tape-recorded his interview. The tape of the interview revealed that the immigration officer had distorted and twisted Nguyen Manh Hung’s answers (Wolf, 1990:163).

94 The case was eventually overturned on appeal.
background knowledge about Vietnam, particularly concerning human rights and political situation, to competently assess claims for refugee status.

Mushkat (1993:567) further criticised Hong Kong’s immigration officers for taking “a restrictive approach” that was not consistent with the “humanitarian spirit” proposed by the CPA. She argued that some officials used political persecution as the only grounds for obtaining refugee status, even though four other grounds are recognised in the 1951 Convention. Furthermore, Mushkat (1993:568) believed that officials failed to comprehend that “severe economic deprivation through the economic policies of government may constitute persecution” and cited examples such as the Vietnamese government’s confiscation of registration certificates and ration cards, and the forced relocations to NEZs. Collins (personal communication, 26 February 1996) maintained that interviewers and interpreters were rarely sympathetic or impartial in their work, but more likely contemptuous. According to Amnesty International (1990a:21), immigration officers rarely gave asylum-seekers the benefit of the doubt—as required by the UNHCR Handbook. Instead, they frequently began from the premise that all Vietnamese asylum-seekers were illegal immigrants, and the purpose of the screening interview was to justify their exclusion. Immigration officers generally considered a tour of duty as a screening process officer an undesirable posting (Amnesty International, 1990a:7).

According to Mot muoi chin, asylum-seekers had to present evidence of persecution and discrimination to the immigration officers in order to be accepted. However, the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights (1992:16) argued that the United Nations definition “does not require an asylum-seeker to prove actual persecution in the country of origin”, but instead a “well-founded fear of persecution” in the future.

95 Mushkat (1993:567) believed that the “restrictive approach” was due to “a lack of familiarity with relevant international standards and/or human rights in Vietnam, or because of attitudinal, cultural, or other reasons”.

96 Mot muoi chin, who had an arm amputated as a result of a war wound, stated that the immigration officer did not believe anything he said during the interview until he produced a piece of scrapnel that had been embedded in his arm during the war. He was subsequently accepted.
There were a number of examples among the study population where siblings who arrived in asylum at different times obtained different results from screening, despite similar experiences in Vietnam. For example, Ba muoi chin obtained refugee status, but his brother—who apparently “suffered the same difficult life and fears in Vietnam”—was rejected for refugee status. The inability of the interviews to elicit consistent information within a family would suggest that there were major problems within the interviewing process.

Communication problems created by inadequate interpretation were another dilemma frequently identified in the screening interviews. For example, Mot muoi mot argued that many interpreters did not know of the problems and life in Vietnam because they had left the country before 1975. This is supported by Amnesty International (1990a:23), which found that that most interpreters in Hong Kong were ethnic Chinese who had been born in Vietnam, but had lived in Hong Kong for many years. They argued that some interpreters were unfamiliar with changes in the use of language that may have been pertinent in the refugee status determination. The interpreter during Nam muoi tam’s interview was half-Vietnamese and half-Filipino, and there were some parts of Vietnam that she did not know about. In addition, the interpreter made Nam muoi tam feel uncomfortable, as though the interpreter did not understand her answer.

The tri-lingual interview format was a major communication problem. During interviews, questions and answers were translated back and forth into Vietnamese and Cantonese by an interpreter, who was then required to write the answers in English on the interview form. In reality, the English translations were frequently not completed.

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97 For example, Amnesty International (1990b:23) identified that the Vietnamese word Bô đồi was used generically by Cantonese-speaking Vietnamese to refer to army personnel. However, in Vietnam before 1975 it was used to refer to North Vietnamese army personnel, while Quản đồi was used to refer to the South Vietnamese army. In an interview observed by a UNHCR official, a former South Vietnamese soldier had denied being Bô đồi and appeared insulted at the accusation.

98 There is considerable linguistic diversity in regions within Vietnam, so that a person from one region of Vietnam may not necessarily be able to understand a person from another region. The dialect differences are most pronounced between the former North Vietnam and South Vietnam.
until after the interview, when the immigration officer returned to Immigration Department headquarters.

Allegations of corruption in the CPA screening procedures were widespread, with interviewing officials denying refugee status to asylum-seekers who warranted it because they were unable to pay bribes or, in some instances, provide sexual favours (UNHCR, 1995:7). The UNHCR stated that it could not rule out corruption, "particularly in situations where asylum seekers and government screening teams frequently live in the same camps, with large sums of money being remitted from family members overseas" (UNHCR, 1995:7).99 However, the UNHCR (1995:7) claimed that "few refugees—if any—were unjustly screened out because of corruption or malfeasance", and that it was more likely that some asylum-seekers paid bribes to enable themselves to be screened-in.100

The screening of Vietnamese asylum-seekers under the CPA did not accurately reflect the reality of the situation in Vietnam. The Lawyers Committee for Human Rights (cited in Mushkat, 1993:562) claimed that thousands of Vietnamese were wrongfully denied refugee protection because of deficiencies in the determination procedures. The results of a 1990 survey of Hong Kong detention centre residents led Collins (personal communication, 26 February 1996) to estimate that between twenty-one and forty-five per cent of the camp populations were bona fide refugees.101

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99 There were two local consultants employed by the UNHCR in Indonesia and the Philippines who were accused of corruption by non-government organizations. They ceased to be employed by the UNHCR (UNHCR, 1995a:7).

100 The UNHCR (1995a:7) stated that a re-examination of 14,000 first and second instance decisions in Malaysia revealed only 67 outcomes that varied from the recommendations made by UNHCR. UNHCR recommended rejection of 46 cases that were accepted by Malaysia, and recommended acceptance in 21 cases that were rejected. Of the 21 rejected cases, 19 were subsequently granted refugee status on appeal, one case voluntarily repatriated to Vietnam and one remains in Malaysia (UNHCR, 1995a:7).

101 In 1990, Bill Collins conducted a survey of asylum-seekers in Hong Kong, Thailand and Malaysia. A systematic scientific sample of ten per cent of all Vietnamese asylum-seekers was drawn. The carefully controlled survey had a high rate of participation that resulted in 1,350 interviews being completed. However, the results regarding bona fide refugee populations were contrary to the expectations and policies of the UNHCR and so they classified the final report and would not permit the publication of the findings (Collins, 1992:3; Collins, personal communication, 26 February 1996).
contrast, only 12.9 per cent of asylum-seekers were granted refugee status following the initial interview (Table 6.7). A three month study of Vietnamese in Hong Kong’s detention centres by Wolf (1990:167) “conservatively” estimated between forty and sixty per cent of asylum-seekers were refugees under the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol. The unwillingness of UNHCR to release the findings of Collin’s survey was regrettable. Amnesty International (1990a), Collins (1992), Lawyers Committee for Human Rights (1992b), Mushkat (1993) and Wolf (1990) have all identified serious flaws in determination procedures that have resulted in thousands of asylum-seekers being rejected for refugee status.

The appellate process did not escape criticism. Mushkat (1993:568) believed that the “most glaring administrative defect” in Hong Kong’s determination process was the RSRB’s failure to permit appellants to personally present their case and their “exclusive reliance on interview transcripts, compiled by examining officers lacking sufficient knowledge of international human rights and refugee law”. Furthermore, the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights (1992:16) accused the RSRB of being too harsh in judging an applicant’s credibility, failing to give appellants the benefit of the doubt, and misapplying international law criteria.

Respondents’ Perspectives on Screening

Despite all respondents obtaining refugee status, the determination procedures were considered “unfair” by half of them (54 persons or 50.0%) and difficult by a further nine per cent (10 persons). Less than four out of every ten respondents (37.0% or 40 persons) thought the determination procedures were fair or satisfactory, with little variation between RS and TC respondents (Table 6.8).

The difference in estimates is probably a result of Wolf’s (1990) study not being as extensive as the one undertaken by Collins. The former stated that he interviewed dozens of boat people who had been denied refugee status. It was probably also a reflection of different interpretation by the two researchers.
A number of respondents argued that immigration officers were often ignorant of the conditions in Vietnam. For example, Bay muoi ba argued that the Hong Kong officials had never been to Vietnam and didn’t know about the communist regime. They only collected information from radio broadcasts and newspapers. The immigration officials were not the right people to make a decision. They make many harmful decisions for the boat people.

The interviewer did not believe Chin muoi’s claim of persecution and stated that it was the policy of the Vietnamese government and that “all the persecution and discrimination suffered were just policies of communists”.

Table 6.8

Respondents’ Opinions of Status Determination Procedures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Asylum Country</th>
<th>Fair</th>
<th>Difficult</th>
<th>Unfair</th>
<th>No Comment</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Philippines</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>2^</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>2^</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>40</strong></td>
<td><strong>10</strong></td>
<td><strong>54</strong></td>
<td><strong>4</strong></td>
<td><strong>108</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

^ Two respondents arrived before the implementation of the CPA and did not comment.
^ Two respondents married before screening, and did not comment.

Source: Field study, 1994

The most outspoken critic of the screening procedures was Bay, who claimed that even though asylum-seekers had experienced terrible events in Vietnam and had verified a well-founded fear of persecution, they were refused refugee status by immigration officers who simply stated “we don’t believe your story”. He accused immigration officers in Hong Kong of fabricating details, distorting statements, omitting important details and, in some cases, of destroying files. He also claimed that if details had been fully transcribed then it would have been hard to refuse refugee status. This supports the accusations against immigration officers made by Amnesty International (1990a), Collins (1996) and Wolf (1990) above.
The problem of inaccurate translation was mentioned by a number of other respondents. For example, *Hai tram mot* claimed to the immigration official that his older brother was a “Ranger”—an elite airborne unit—which resulted in his family being subjected to discrimination and persecution. However, the translation stated that his brother was “a soldier”. *Hai tram mot* became quite agitated as he described the difference, and how his family suffered severe persecution because of his brother’s military background. In another case, it was written that *Hai tram chin* had been granted 3,000 square metres of land to farm by the government, whereas in actual fact he had stated that he had been assigned to work this land as a labourer. *Nam muoi chin* accused the Immigration Department in Hong Kong of not following the rules of the screening process. He claimed that AVS and UNHCR both rejected what the immigration officer had written at his interview.

*Bay muoi mot* argued that the sudden departure of most boat people from Vietnam often did not allow sufficient time to collect and bring documents and other evidence. Consequently, they had to rely on oral descriptions during interviews, but which immigration officers did not believe. A number of refugees, including *Tam muoi sau*, expressed difficulty in proving their persecution in Vietnam to the interviewing officers. *Bay muoi tam* claimed that some people who proved that they were persecuted in Vietnam, and had witnesses, were still rejected. This made him think that the screening process was unfair. *Tam muoi bay* claimed that officials acknowledged that he had been a victim of the communists in Vietnam, but they claimed that it was not enough persecution for him to be a refugee, so they rejected him. The screening process was unfair in *Mot tram ba’s* opinion because some people with political reasons for leaving Vietnam were rejected, while some with only economic reasons were accepted.

*Sau* thought the process was very difficult and complex, and it was not easy for the asylum-seekers to obtain refugee status. Language problems caused many difficulties in the screening process, according to *Tam muoi*, who found it difficult to describe what she wanted to say because the interviewer and interpreter spoke different
dias. Mot tram tam claimed that the screening process was very difficult. In Ba’s opinion, the screening process was very difficult, and the outcome could depend on luck and chance.

Mot muoi bon was one of the respondent’s who thought the screening process was fair, albeit very hard to pass. According to Chin muoi ba, officials considered cases “without favour”, so that if asylum-seekers told their true story about suffering in Vietnam they would be screened in. Therefore, he thought the screening was fair.

Another respondent who thought the screening process was fair was Chin, who argued that no one could bribe the immigration officers in Hong Kong. Both Chin and Tam muoi nam thought the screening process was better in Hong Kong because there was no bribery, even though they did not “screen in” as many persons.

There were numerous allegations of corruption against immigration officials in the Philippines. For example, Nam muoi tam was asked by the interviewing officer whether she knew Miss Nam, and she answered that she did, but that she was not a close friend. After the interview someone went to her house and explained that Miss Nam was a go-between for bribes, and she should pay some money to her in order to obtain refugee status. Hai muoi hai stated that Filipino immigration officials accepted bribes to grant refugee status, and that the amount of the bribe depended on the affluence of the individual. Hai muoi sau also stated that refugee status was often obtained as a result of money or gifts. Ba muoi nam told how a friend of his bought their refugee status for US$600, while Hai muoi sau and Hai tram mot both claimed that it cost between US$500 and $1000 to bribe an official. Hai tram mot added that some of the Vietnamese women were told that they would be accepted if they slept with the immigration officials.

The wide variety of opinions offered by respondents on the screening process was largely influenced by personal experiences—not merely of the interviews themselves, but other facts such as life in Vietnam, preparation for interviews, etc. As a general rule, the more difficulty a person had obtaining refugee status, the less positive
their remarks about the screening process. Few persons who were screened in at the first interview made derogatory remarks about the screening.

Despite, or because of, the inherent flaws in the screening process, the program achieved its major goals. Clandestine departures from Vietnam fell dramatically after the introduction of the CPA. Almost twenty-five years after the first wave of refugees fled Vietnam the exodus has stopped and nearly all those determined to be refugees have resettled to third countries,\(^{103}\) while most of those rejected as refugees have been returned to Vietnam. It is unfortunate that these goals were achieved at extreme personal costs.

**SUMMARY**

The confinement of asylum-seekers in Hong Kong’s detention centres and the asylum camps in the Philippines and other first asylum countries in the region truly reflected the “midway-to-nowhere” or “limbo” stage proposed by Kunz (1973:133), Bousquet (1987:47), Knudsen (1983:170) and others. Vietnamese asylum-seekers were stranded in limbo—halfway on their journey from hell to paradise—in which their future passage was governed by the outcome of a screening process.

Life in the first asylum camps and detention centres of the Philippines and Hong Kong was generally an extremely unpleasant and difficult experience for asylum-seekers. The sole purpose of the camps was to confine asylum-seekers until they were screened. The examination of camp conditions undertaken in this study has provided detailed information about some of the major aspects of living in the camps. Living conditions in these institutions can only be described as appalling—extremely overcrowded, in hot and uncomfortable buildings that offered little privacy, where they were provided with only the minimum basic needs necessary to survive. There were

\(^{103}\) As at July 1999, there were 990 genuine refugees still waiting to be resettled from Hong Kong (Hong Kong Government, 1999).
numerous allegations that conditions in some camps were intentionally unpleasant so as to act as a deterrent to people planning to flee Vietnam, as well as to entice asylum-seekers to volunteer to repatriate. There is sufficient evidence available from different sources to suggest this is correct.

Many of the asylum-seekers who arrived in asylum countries suffered from traumas previously sustained in Vietnam and/or during their escape from that country. The experience of living in these overcrowded, violent and sometimes unhealthy environments was also a significant source of stress. Asylum-seekers were frequently exposed, either directly or indirectly, to violence, such as robberies, assaults, stabbings, rapes and murders. In addition, corruption, prostitution and extortion were widespread.

This study has shown that conditions in the Hong Kong detention centres were generally worse than at the PFAC in the Philippines. At least in the Philippines asylum-seekers had the opportunity to educate themselves by studying languages, especially English, or undertaking vocational training courses. In Hong Kong, language and education classes were restricted to children, and opportunities for other courses were severely limited. Consequently, asylum-seekers in Hong Kong had few activities to keep themselves amused and it is no wonder that they were more violent environments. Asylum-seekers in the Philippines were also allowed much more freedom, being permitted to leave the camp during the day, whereas Hong Kong asylum-seekers were restricted to sections within a camp. The detention centres in Hong Kong resembled prisons, with rows of tall fences topped with razor-wire. In contrast, PFAC only had a single, 1.5 metre tall, wire-mesh fence surrounding it on three sides.

The greater the period of incarceration while waiting for refugee status determination, the greater the likelihood of stress. Governments have been criticised for the length of time it has taken to screen asylum-seekers. As noted above, most asylum-seekers had to wait years to be screened. Those unsuccessful at the initial screening then had to wait even longer to be reviewed by an appeal board, and consequently endure the sub-standard living conditions even longer. While the detention of asylum-
seekers in the camps was an anxious period for all, some sections of the asylum-seeking population, such as children, were particularly susceptible to stress. McCallin (1993:2) found that the longer a child spent in detention, the greater the possibility of them suffering emotionally.¹⁰⁴

Asylum-seekers suffered because of their separation from their family in Vietnam and the loss of traditional support networks. Most asylum-seekers were uncertain about their future, so there was often little purpose in their everyday lives. There were few activities to keep people occupied, and many just spent their time lying in their bunks waiting to be screened. To make matters worse, Vietnamese gangs ravaged the camps and preyed on vulnerable individuals and groups. The gateway for most asylum-seekers to get out of limbo was through the screening process.¹⁰⁵ Those persons who were granted refugee status moved from asylum camps and detention centres to transit camps and open camps, and ultimately, resettlement to one of the Western nations. The only choice remaining for those asylum-seekers rejected for refugee status was repatriation to Vietnam—although many delayed adopting this option for some time.

The introduction of screening procedures was criticised by various experts as being a panic reaction to control the influx of Vietnamese boat people. Furthermore, the procedures implemented to determine refugee status were severely criticised by a wide variety of sources—refugees, researchers, and international human rights organizations—for being difficult, Euro-centric and conducted by persons with little

¹⁰⁴ McCallin’s (1993) study of the situation of children in the Hong Kong detention centres was a two-part study involving 56 in-depth interviews and a representative survey of 603 respondents. The study found that the majority of children in the detention centres were depressed and anxious, displayed a lack of energy and disinterest in what was going on around them, and fearful for their personal safety. In addition, it found that the length of stay in detention centres was a significant factor in determining emotional well-being. The well-being of all the children deteriorated over time. In addition, the longer a child was in a detention centre, the more likely he/she would witness, or be involved in, a traumatic event—such as physical assault, sexual assault, bullying, coercion, prostitution, witness to suicide, substance abuse, hunger strikes, demonstrations, riots, etc. The length of time to determine refugee status was found to be a significant source of stress.

¹⁰⁵ As mentioned previously, marriage was a way out of the asylum camps for a small percentage of asylum-seekers.
expertise in international refugee law and little or no knowledge of the conditions people were fleeing from.

The evidence presented in this chapter supports the claim that the introduction of screening was a desperate attempt to stop the refugee influx, and that there was little concern about the rights and status of individuals. Problems inherent in the screening process, and with immigration officials, resulted in thousands of deserving people being rejected.

There are many aspects about the repatriation of asylum-seekers to Vietnam that are worthy of research. Although the UNHCR has investigated the reintegration of repatriated asylum-seekers into Vietnamese society, little information has been released about their findings. Consequently, we remain ill-informed about those rejected asylum-seekers who returned to Vietnam. The Vietnamese government should permit researchers to investigate this important refugee sub-population.

The next stage for those who successfully obtained refugee status was to be transferred to a refugee camp. In the Philippines, refugees were moved to the RRTC at Bataan, while in Hong Kong they were shifted to one of the open camps, or to the RRTC. These refugees were fortunate that the agonising asylum camp experience was over and the next stage of the refugee experience—the refugee camp—was about to begin. Details of the refugee camp experience are discussed in Chapter 7.
REFUGEES IN TRANSIT:
The Regional Resettlement Transit Center

Oh freedom brothers! hear our cry.
Forget us not or pass us by
As we within these wires abide
Here yearning for the other side.

Oh Sisters free! our hearts cry out
With unseen tears, a silent shout,
For while we pine for freedom land
Our future finds an iron hand.

Oh thou free world! we pray that you
Will open doors and let us through,
A feast for which our fathers sigh,
A chance—for which our children cry.

Patrick Geeves (1995:93)

All Vietnamese who obtained refugee status at the Philippines First Asylum Camp (PFAC), together with a significant number of refugees from the even more inhospitable detention camps in Hong Kong, were soon transferred to the Regional Resettlement Transit Center (RRTC) in the Philippines, where they waited for resettlement to a third country. The main purpose of this camp, as the name denotes, was to provide “short-term” transit accommodation to Vietnamese refugees while they sought third country resettlement. While detained in the camp, refugees were interviewed by immigration officials from resettlement countries, underwent medical checks to determine whether they were “medically suitable” for resettlement, and
attended educational, vocational and cultural orientation classes to help equip themselves for their new lives ahead.

This transitory period in the Vietnamese refugee migration is the focus of this chapter. The objective of the chapter is to describe the refugee experience at the RRTC from arrival to departure. This will be accomplished by describing the facilities and conditions at the RRTC complex, together with an investigation of the people and institutions that controlled refugees in the camp. The final section looks at the expectations of a cohort of refugees about their imminent resettlement to Australia.

**THE REGIONAL RESETTLEMENT TRANSIT CENTER (RRTC)**

The Regional Resettlement Transit Center (RRTC) was located eight kilometres inland from the small coastal township of Morong, on the western rim of the Bataan peninsula on the main island of Luzon (Figure 7.1). It is somewhat ironic that the camp looked out over the South China Sea—a stretch of water that was all too familiar to many of the refugees in the camp. The methodical and functional planning of the camp, together with well-constructed and weatherproof buildings in clean and spacious grounds, made this camp one of the best refugee camps in the region.

The camp consisted of fifty-three accommodation buildings each with five living units (billets), located in two neighbourhoods: twenty-three buildings in Neighbourhood Eleven and thirty buildings in Neighbourhood Twelve (Figure 7.2). The two neighbourhoods were separated by a playing field, a clinic building, a stage and a secondary road. The UNHCR Resettlement Officer and the RRTC PROCROSS office were centrally located in the camp. The International Social Service (ISS) administration building occupied a transformed billet in Neighbourhood Twelve and the Community and Family Services International (CFSI) annexe for unaccompanied

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1 Only 249 billets were used for accommodation while sixteen billets were used for other purposes.
2 PROCROSS was the PRPC office responsible for processing and community organization and social services.
Figure 7.1
Location of Regional Refugee Transit Center
Figure 7.2

Plan of Regional Refugee Transit Center

LEGEND
- REFUGEE BILLET
- ABLUTION BLOCK
- SCHOOL HOUSE
- N.C.O. - NEIGHBOURHOOD COUNCIL OFFICE
- F.D.U. - FOOD DISTRIBUTION UNIT
- N.G.O. OFFICE
- PRPC/RETC FACILITY

APPROX SCALE
0 100 200
metres
minors was in Neighbourhood Eleven. Numerous classrooms were scattered throughout the neighbourhoods. The camp market and the security building were located on the western edge of Neighbourhood Twelve, near the guard-house that controlled the entrance to the camp. Across the main road from Neighbourhood Twelve was a small group of staff dormitories.

**ARRIVAL AT THE RRTC**

Refugees were transferred from the PFAC on Palawan or Hong Kong detention centres via the Philippines Refugee Transit Center (PRTC) in Manila.³ From there they were transported to the RRTC aboard red “Victory Liner” buses—a journey that took between three and four hours. When the buses stopped outside the PRPC administration building upon arrival, beleaguered faces would look out from every bus window at their new environment, searching for a familiar face in the small crowd that would begin to congregate around them. There would be an occasional squeal of delight as someone recognised an old friend from a previous camp, or perhaps even from Vietnam. After a brief wait in the hot Filipino sun, the non-airconditioned buses moved on to the arrival/departure building in Phase I where the new arrivals would be processed.⁴

The buses stopped outside the large, semi-open building and again the passengers remained inside the hot vehicles, waiting to be told to disembark. The faces of the hot and tired passengers dripped with perspiration as they struggled to drag their cumbersome bags, crammed full of all their possessions, along the bus floor. Passengers then silently congregated in a small covered waiting area adjacent to the departure building, waiting to receive the next set of instructions.

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³ Refugees from both Hong Kong and the PFAC at Palawan had an overnight stop at the PRTC after flying to Manila. They would then travel the 200 kilometres to the RRTC the next day.

⁴ Although the building was used for both arrivals and departures, it was nearly always referred to as the “departure building”. The large building was approximately twenty-five metres deep by ten metres wide. It was semi-open, with concrete walls interspersed with iron grilles to provide ventilation. It was all covered by a large asbestos roof.
Inside, a group of Vietnamese volunteers busily worked on the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) passenger list that had accompanied the new arrivals. They copied the name of each Principal Refugee Applicant (PRA) from the passenger manifest to registration and refugee cards.\(^5\) In addition, they also stamped each applicant’s IOM card, which contained the photo, name, arrival group, RS/TC number and other details of the refugee.

When all the cards were ready, a volunteer called out the names of each new PRA and told the refugees to line up. Each case (family) proceeded slowly along a long table staffed by Vietnamese volunteers and Filipino staff. The volunteers asked the principal applicant in each case their date of birth, occupation, religion, educational level, and English language proficiency and wrote the responses onto registration cards. The refugees then moved on to a Filipino staff-member who allocated accommodation, and issued a billeting slip.\(^6\) Whenever possible, new arrivals were accommodated with relatives or friends already living in the camp, which sometimes caused problems with overcrowding in the billets. Accommodation details were also recorded on registration and refugee cards and copies of the passenger list before the refugee signed and kept the refugee card. The final person at the table, a Filipino staff-member, distributed a temporary food ration, consisting of rice, mung beans and cans of sardines in a plastic bag to each newly-arrived refugee. The ration was supposed to provide five meals for the refugee until their normal ration was delivered.\(^7\)

While refugees were being processed, their baggage was hastily examined by security guards for contraband goods, such as high wattage electrical goods, weapons, drugs, etc. Any contraband goods found were confiscated, sometimes only temporarily, in which case a receipt was issued.\(^8\)

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\(^5\) The camp registration card (Appendix 11) was maintained at the administration office. The refugee card was kept by the refugee, and used to record employment, UNHCR and other details.

\(^6\) The billeting slip recorded details of the refugee’s accommodation in the camp.

\(^7\) For refugees who arrived on Friday, Saturdays or Sundays, the ration was increased to provide eight meals until the normal ration was delivered.

\(^8\) Electrical appliances were confiscated for the duration of the owner’s stay in the camp. They could be reclaimed just prior to the refugee’s departure from the camp.
It took approximately three hours to process one busload of new arrivals. When all the paperwork was completed, the new arrivals boarded a PRPC bus with their luggage and were driven down to Neighbourhoods Eleven and Twelve in RRTC. Some arrivals were greeted by friends and taken to their billets, while others found their own way to their new homes.

**Camp Facilities**

There were some notable differences in facilities at the RRTC compared with those at the PFAC or the Hong Kong detention centres. Facilities at this camp varied from very good to very poor. The following section summarises refugees’ opinions of the major facilities provided to them in the camp.

*Camp Regulations and Discipline*

Refugees at RRTC were required to obey a set of camp regulations. According to *Tam muoi chin*, new arrivals were advised of the regulations upon arrival, and there were weekly meetings to talk about regulations. Among the major regulations were the prohibition of drinking alcohol in the billets, no gambling, a ban on fighting, the observance of the 9:30 p.m. curfew, and compulsory sleeping in the allocated billet. An amusing comment was made by *Muoi*, who stated that in Australia they encouraged people to drink beer, but at RRTC they put people in prison for doing it.

Those who disobeyed camp regulations were subject to imprisonment in the camp gaol for periods of up to twenty-eight days. The camp gaol—a small concrete building, with iron grilles and doors, situated within an iron-mesh fence and located well away from the refugee housing—was run by the Philippines Constabulary. Prisoners were permitted to move within the fenced area during the day, but were locked

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9 Refugees were permitted to drink beer at an outside “bar/beer garden” in Phase II run by Filipinos, that was later transferred to the RRTC.

10 The gaol was officially known as the Social Rehabilitation Center. However, the refugees referred to it as the “monkey house”.

11 The police arm of the Philippines Army.
within the building at night. There was a separate cell block for women located within an adjoining office building. Prisoners were not provided with meals, but relied on friends and relatives to bring food to them daily. Those guilty of a serious transgression of regulations, such as serious assault or rape, were generally incarcerated at Balanga gaol.  

Nine out of ten respondents (89.8% or 92 persons) approved of the camp regulations. Refugees such as Tam muoi chin considered the regulations to be strict, which he thought provided a feeling of peace and security. However, some other respondents claimed that the regulations were not strong enough and should have been stricter.

**Camp Security**

Security at the PRPC/RRTC was maintained by a private security firm, with direction coming from the PRPC security chief. The guards were commonly referred to as “blue guards” by the refugees, a reference to the colour of their uniforms. They were armed with shotguns or rifles, and maintained a vigilant presence in the camp. Each evening there was a “changing of the guards” on the road outside the security office adjoining Neighbourhood Twelve. The guards maintained the check-point at the entrance to the camp, and patrolled all parts of the camp—even areas such as Phase I that had been closed. As Geiger (1994:351) stated, “there was a real need for security in the neighbourhoods. The need arose from both the openness of the camp to the much poorer surrounding community and the refugees themselves.”

The vast majority of respondents (88.9% or 92 persons) approved of security at RRTC. They claimed that security was good and strict, which resulted in a peaceful and orderly camp. Mot tram was typical of respondents when he commented that the blue guards always patrolled the camp and kept it secure. Similarly, Tam muoi bay claimed

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12 One person in the sampling frame could not be interviewed because he was imprisoned at Balanga for assault.

13 The guards were employed by JISA Protective and Security Agency. They were hired on a contract basis in Manila.
that the guards always protected them. Females, such as *Bon muoi hai*, felt especially secure by the presence of the guards, claiming that the single women in the neighbourhood were protected by the guards.

There were only twelve respondents (11.1%) who were critical of the security arrangements in the camp. Some, such as *Mot muoi bay*, argued that security was not strict, while others argued it was worse than Hong Kong or Palawan. *Mot tram bay* was critical of the security guards, arguing that they did not go to a disturbance immediately, but only solved the problem afterwards. *Nam muoi bay* did not approve of the behaviour of the security guards towards the refugees, arguing they could do anything to the Vietnamese and sometimes abused their power. He likened the security guards to the Vietnamese police, because they could search a refugee’s house anytime without the occupant’s permission. Guards did search billets for contraband goods, generally alcohol, although this did not occur very frequently.

Some accusations of corruption were levelled against persons within the PRPC security office during field work. In one instance, a refugee allegedly bribed a PRPC security official not to investigate an assault until the victim had resettled.

**Housing**

Refugee housing at the RRTC was far superior to that at the PFAC or the Hong Kong detention centres, and even better than the neighbouring PRPC housing.  

Housing units, known as billets, were two-storey dwellings with five units grouped in one block, with each billet given a unique identifier. A billet measured approximately four metres wide by six metres long (Figure 7.3). The ground floor and a section of the back walls were constructed of concrete, with the remaining walls built of marine plywood. At the back of each billet was the cooking area, with a small concrete sink

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14 The style of housing at the RRTC was similar in style to the PRPC, but bigger and constructed of better materials: notably plywood instead of asbestos. For a description of the PRPC housing, and the asbestos problem, see Tollefson (1989).

15 Every billet in the RRTC was given a five digit alpha-numeric identifier. The first two digits identified the neighbourhood (either 11 or 12), followed by another two numbers. This number identified the block e.g. 1218 or 1125. The five billets in each block were identified by a letter. Facing the front of any block, the billets ran A to E from left to right.
and bench. On the right-hand side was a washing cubicle that measured about one by two metres. The back door led to a common area that was often used to grow vegetables. In the middle of each unit, underneath a single fluorescent light, was a long table with attached wooden benches. There was usually a large slatted, wooden frame in the front of each billet, that was used for sleeping and/or sitting. Three plywood shutters across the front of each billet could be opened to allow any breeze to flow through, or closed to stop the rain and for security. There was also a plywood door. A flight of stairs on the right-hand side led to the upstairs area, which was loft-style under a steeply-raked corrugated iron roof. The upstairs floor was made of wooden planks, with a ten millimetre gap between boards to assist ventilation, but which also allowed dust to fall below. The upstairs walls were constructed of marine plywood. There were four small plywood shutters running across the front and back walls to assist ventilation. A single fluorescent light in the middle of the raked ceiling lit the upstairs area in the evening.

Billets were sparsely decorated by refugees. The upstairs area was generally divided into separate areas by sheets of fabric hung from ropes stretched across the billet—the number of divisions depending on the number of cases/families in each billet, and the size of the divisions dependent on the size of each case. These offered refugees some privacy from the other occupants. Refugees stored their personal possessions in their respective area, usually in suitcases or chests, and there were often makeshift bookcases and cupboards. Sheets of vinyl flooring were strewn across the floors and used as sleeping mats. The plywood walls in some billets were wallpapered with sheets of A4 paper. Many refugees maintained a small shrine in one part of the billet, where they worshipped ancestors by burning incense and offering food. Christian refugees often had a small religious depiction hanging on a wall. The entrance to many

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16 When a refugee was questioned about the papering of the walls with sheets of A4 paper he replied that it was done to stop dust. It is plausible that this well-established habit was copied by the RRTC residents from the PRPC billets. The billets in the PRPC were built from asbestos, and the wall-papering of the asbestos walls may have stopped asbestos chips and dust breaking off the walls.
billets was protected by a small mirror above the front door to ward-off evil spirits. The billets were, almost without fail, kept exceptionally clean.

Figure 7.3
Plan of Billet in RRTC

The average number of persons per billet varied enormously over the years as the camp population fluctuated. Both *Ba muoi nam* and *Nam muoi chin* commented that the billets had previously been very crowded, with sixteen to eighteen people in every billet. However, density levels during 1994 were comparatively low, although they did increase slightly due to the transfer of 500 ODP persons from the PRPC. In October 1994, there were 579 refugees living in 104 billets in Neighbourhood Eleven (5.5 persons per billet) and 1,048 refugees living in 145 billets in Neighbourhood Twelve.

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17 Neighbourhoods 7 and 10 in the PRPC were closed in July 1994 to concentrate activities and the ODP residents transferred to twelve sections of Neighbourhood 12 in the RRTC.
(7.2 persons per billet). Overall, there were 1,627 residents in 249 billets (6.5 persons per billet), with numbers varying from a high of fourteen (twelve adults and two children) to a low of one adult (Regional Resettlement Transit Center, 1994; Figure 7.4).

Figure 7.4

Number of Persons per Billet by Neighbourhood, October 1994

Two blocks of billets in Neighbourhood 11 were reserved for single women. These were situated near the neighbourhood office, where a guard was posted twenty-four hours a day to provide additional security.

Some billets were considered by refugees to be “lucky”, because their residents were resettled quickly. Friends of recently resettled residents would frequently move into their billets after their friends had departed in the hope that the luck would pass onto them. There was also one billet that was deemed “unlucky” after the suicide of its occupant, and which was subsequently closed.

The vast majority (96.3%) of respondents considered their accommodation to be satisfactory. Respondents commented that the billets were spacious and clean, and were

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18 The 1,627 residents in neighbourhood 12 included 636 RS/TC refugees living in 89 billets (7.1 persons per billet) and 412 ODP persons in 56 billets (7.4 persons per billet).

19 Refugees had to apply to the PROCOS office to transfer billets. Processing through PROCOS was essential so that ration records could be altered.
comfortable to live in. Only Ba muoi hai, who had twelve people living in his billet, complained that the housing was crowded. The only other negative comments were from former Hong Kong residents Nam muoi sau and Chin muoi bay, who both stated that the dwellings were hot in summer and needed ceiling fans, and Sau muoi hai, who said water often entered the houses during the rainy season.

Food ration

RRTC refugees were provided with a daily food ration comprising meat or fish, rice, vegetables, fruit and condiments, which was supposedly sufficient for two meals per day (Table 7.1). The ration was delivered Monday to Friday, with the Saturday and Sunday rations also delivered on Friday. Other rations, such as rice, sugar, cooking oil and charcoal, were delivered in bulk and on a less regular basis, usually monthly. In addition, refugees also received toothpaste and toilet paper each month.

Refugees were issued with cooking pots and pans together with plates and chopsticks, shortly after their arrival.

The distribution of rations at both the PRPC and the RRTC was managed by a central food office, operated by Filipino staff and assisted by Vietnamese volunteers. Food was allocated in bulk—calculated by weight for every individual more than six months old—for every block of five billets. Bulk rations were delivered in numbered crates to a central distribution centre in each neighbourhood every weekday morning between 9:30 and 10:00 a.m. The rations were collected by Vietnamese volunteers (building leaders) from each block, who were responsible for the further

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20 Accommodation units in the Hong Kong detention centres were equipped with ceiling fans.
21 The basic ration was supposedly equal to 2,100 calories per day, which was the requirement set by the UNHCR.
22 In late 1994, deliveries were reduced to three times a week: Monday, Wednesday and Friday.
23 Some of the additional supplies, such as toothpaste, were withdrawn in mid-1994 when UNHCR cut the camp’s budget.
24 There was a ration of milk formula powder allocated for infants less than six months old from the hospital. Children more than six months old were issued with three-quarters the adult allowance.
25 For example, if there were thirty adults and ten children living in a block, then the meat (pork) allocation on Tuesday would be 30 @ 100 grams for adults (3.0 kg) and 10 @ 75 grams for children (0.75 kg). Total meat rations for the block would be 3.75 kg.
division and distribution of the food within each block. The building leaders returned to their billet with the block’s allocation. Other refugees in that block gave their building leader plastic containers to collect their ration. They watched as the volunteer weighed the food on scales and divided the rations for each case assigned to that block. The division of food was a very meticulous operation, that sometimes caused arguments—either because a person thought they did not receive their full quota or because they received less desirable cuts of the ration.

Eight out of every ten respondents (79.6% or 86 persons) claimed that their ration allocation was insufficient. Although the ration was supposed to provide fourteen meals per week, Tam muoi bon argued that in reality there was only enough food for seven meals. This was supported by Chin muoi bon, who stated the ration was only adequate for half a day. A number of refugees, including Sau muoi sau and Tam muoi bay, claimed that the rice allocation was sufficient, but there was not enough meat or vegetables provided. Another frequent complaint was that the meat ration (chicken) provided for Saturday and Sunday was delivered on Friday. However, because there was no refrigeration to store the meat, it had to be cooked on Friday otherwise it would have spoiled. Consequently, refugees did not have any meat over the weekend unless they purchased additional supplies from the market. Some refugees, like Bay muoi tam, stated they became vegetarians on Saturday and Sunday because they could not afford to buy additional food. Three respondents also complained about the quality of the food, saying that the meat was often rotten.

Bay muoi chin was one of the twenty-two respondents who stated that the ration was sufficient, but he claimed this was only because his two children did not eat much. Tam muoi bay claimed that some single people ate with families so there would be more food, as the children usually did not eat very much.

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26 Occasionally, a person did not live in the billet they were assigned to. They would have to go to the billet each day to collect their ration.
Table 7.1
Daily Food Rations at RRTC (per adult)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RATION</th>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
<th>Friday</th>
<th>Saturday</th>
<th>Sunday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rice</td>
<td>440g</td>
<td>440g</td>
<td>440g</td>
<td>440g</td>
<td>440g</td>
<td>440g</td>
<td>440g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooking oil</td>
<td>20g</td>
<td>20g</td>
<td>20g</td>
<td>20g</td>
<td>20g</td>
<td>20g</td>
<td>20g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sugar</td>
<td>20g</td>
<td>20g</td>
<td>20g</td>
<td>20g</td>
<td>20g</td>
<td>20g</td>
<td>20g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beans</td>
<td>25g</td>
<td>25g</td>
<td>25g</td>
<td>25g</td>
<td>25g</td>
<td>25g</td>
<td>25g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sardines</td>
<td>1 tin</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gabi(^d)</td>
<td>85g</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lakatan(^b)</td>
<td>100g</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Pork</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>100g</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Kangkong(^e)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>150g</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Watermelon</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>100g</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Bangus(^d)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>180g</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Squash</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>150g</td>
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<tr>
<td>Saba(^e)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>100g</td>
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<td>100g</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eggs</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ampalaya(^f)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>150g</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Latuudan(^g)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>100g</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Alumahan(^h)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>190g</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>D.Hasas-Hasa(^i)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>115g</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Abitsnoks(^l)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>85g</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cavendish</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>100g</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicken</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>100g</td>
<td>100g</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nat. pechang(^k)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>150g</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oheyote(^l)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>85g</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cavote(^m)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>150g</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pineapple</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>130g</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\)-tuber.  \(^b\)-a sweet variety of banana.  \(^c\)-water spinach.  
\(^d\)-a type of milkfish.  \(^e\)-variety of banana.  
\(^f\)-moderate sized mackerel, similar to hasa-hasa.  
\(^g\)-species of mackerel.  \(^h\)-type of kidney bean.  
\(^i\)-fish.  \(^j\)-pear-shaped vegetable.  
\(^k\)-sweet potato.

Source: Field study, 1994

Bay muoi ba claimed that a single refugee in Hong Kong could survive without buying additional food, but this was not possible at the RRTC. Most refugees bought extra food to supplement their meagre ration. However, twenty-two respondents stated they did not buy extra food, including four industrious refugees who grew vegetables in their gardens to augment their rations or to sell. Some refugees, such as Chin muoi lam, claimed they had no money to purchase additional food.
The amount of money spent on food and supplies depended on the availability of money and the number of persons in each family. As stated above, many had no money to purchase extra food, while others regularly spent more than P700 per week on food and other supplies (charcoal, fuel, soap, etc.). The average weekly expenditure on food and other supplies for seventy respondents was P200.27 This expenditure was generally divided equally on food and other supplies. Even refugees like Hai muoi bay who did not purchase food, would spend minimal amounts on other supplies, like cooking fuel (P12 per week).

Each case was issued with a small charcoal burner to cook with, which was very slow. Many refugees preferred to use small petroleum-spirit stoves for cooking, which were far quicker.28 The charcoal burners were generally used to cook rice, while the spirit stoves were used for cooking meat and vegetables. As refugees often had little to eat for breakfast, they usually began preparing lunch after the delivery of food and ate their lunch between 11:00 a.m. and 12:00 noon. The evening meal was generally eaten between 6:00 and 7:00 p.m.

Considering the small amount of food provided in the ration, it was quite surprising to witness some refugees sell part of their rations. For example, some vegetarians sold their meat allowance to other refugees, and many frequently sold some of their rice ration to Filipinos who visited the camp regularly specifically to purchase rice. Refugees used the money to purchase food or other goods, particularly cigarettes and cooking fuel. Some of the “more affluent” refugees even bought better quality rice from the market.

It was also heartening to witness refugees give rice to Filipino beggars who frequently wandered the camp seeking food.29 However, late in 1994 the numbers of

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27 Only seventy persons could estimate their weekly expenditure. Many others stated that it depended on their finances from week to week.
28 Refugees were issued with charcoal as part of their ration, but had to purchase the petroleum-spirit.
29 An elderly man and a blind woman accompanied by her daughter were frequently seen walking around the camp. They were often given a cupful of rice by the refugees. The old man would always utter a blessing after being given food.
beggars and the frequency of their visits increased, severely stretching the generosity of the refugees, so that refusal became more common. Filipino children from squatter settlements adjoining the camps regularly wandered around the back of the billets in the evenings collecting left-over food to feed their chickens and pigs.

**Markets**

The PRPC market in Phase II was the centre of activity every morning, attracting refugees from the PRPC and the RRTC as well as Filipino staff.\(^{30}\) The market was situated under a large iron-roofed shelter with open-sides, approximately forty metres long and ten metres wide (Figure 7.5). At the front of the market were a variety of Filipino vendors selling fish, meat, fruit and vegetables from concrete tables. Inside, numerous Filipinos operated “green-grocer shops” from small wooden huts, some only two metres wide by two metres deep and two metres high. A number of larger “general stores” sold a wide variety of goods such as drinks, bread rolls, biscuits, cigarettes, toilet paper, soap and washing powder. Four small “cafes” ran down one side of the market selling a variety of Filipino foods. There were also a clothes stall and a haberdashery stall, as well as a barber shop.

A number of Vietnamese operated small stalls outside the market building, paying minimal daily rent to sell their wares. These Vietnamese sold soup (*pho*), *halo-halo* drinks and *banh mai* rolls from makeshift tables and stools, or clothes or a variety of Vietnamese goods such as tea and perfume. There was even a Vietnamese goldsmith selling his wares and a watch repairer. Another Vietnamese vendor sold second-hand goods, including some items issued by the RRTC.

The RRTC market was a smaller version of the PRPC market, and contained a number of “general stores” and greengrocer stalls (Figure 7.6). It became the focus of morning activity after the transfer of the PRPC refugees to the RRTC, and the

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\(^{30}\) There had also been a market in Phase I, but this had closed down earlier. The Phase II market slowly closed down after the transfer of the PRPC residents to the RRTC in July 1994, although a small number of Filipino stall holders, and all of the Vietnamese operators, moved to the RRTC market.
The subsequent decline of the PRPC market. The Vietnamese who operated “stalls” outside the PRPC market moved down to the RRTC market.

**Figure 7.5**

*Plan of the PRPC market*

Numerous Vietnamese vendors selling a variety of goods

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Some of the more entrepreneurial refugees operated small shops from their billets. There was a restriction of one “shop” for every two billet blocks. They mainly sold soft drinks, ice, cigarettes, noodles and candy. In addition, one refugee baked and sold cakes from his billet, while *Tam muoi mot* repaired radios in his free time. There were also hairdressers, and even an acupuncturist. Some of the former Hong Kong refugees had brought possessions, especially clothes, to sell.

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31 The camp administration encouraged refugees to undertake business ventures, but monitored these activities. It was first necessary to obtain permission from the camp administration to operate a shop or restaurant in a billet.
Refugees would often go to the coffee shops in Neighbourhoods Seven and Ten, which sold hot and cold drinks and some basic meals—usually *pho* and *cha gio*. These were favoured locations during the day, especially for Vietnamese men, to sit on small wooden stools in the shade and drink coffee, smoke cigarettes and talk. A Neighbourhood Ten woman also sold *pho* from an outside stall on makeshift tables and stools for $20 a bowl. Refugees were permitted to drink alcohol in the camp at designated bars—the Phase II restaurant and a “beer garden” in Neighbourhood Ten run by Filipinos—but were prohibited from drinking in their billets. Few refugees ate or

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32 *Pho* is a Vietnamese soup consisting of broth, meat and noodles, while *cha gio* are spring rolls.
33 When Neighbourhoods Seven and Ten closed, the coffee shop proprietors opened new cafes in the old food distribution centres in Neighbourhoods Eleven and Twelve.
34 There were about six metal tables and numerous chairs on a vacant bit of land on the edge of Neighbourhood Ten. There was also a small shed used by the Filipinos to store goods. The operators would arrive at the bar every afternoon and put the beer on ice. If the beer was not cold enough the Vietnamese would put ice in the
drank at the restaurant and preferred to eat at the coffee shops and drink at the beer garden. There was generally a gathering of Vietnamese, predominantly men, sitting around tables drinking cold beer in the warm tropical evenings.

Remittances from Overseas

The receipt of money from relatives or friends overseas was an important element in the lives of many refugees, used to augment the meagre food ration that was issued. Money sent from overseas allowed some residents to maintain a much higher standard of living than would have been otherwise possible. Unlike the Hong Kong detention centres, there was no possibility of obtaining money through working in the camp. Two-thirds of respondents (66.7% or 72 persons) received financial assistance from friends or relatives overseas. However, only eighteen (16.7%) claimed to receive money on a regular basis—generally every month—with amounts varying between US$20 and US$200 per month. Chin muoi sau, who received US$100 every month, claimed it would have been very difficult for his family of four to live in the camp without this assistance. Fifty-four respondents stated that they received money irregularly: from a one-off payment of US$200 to payments varying between US$20 and US$50 every two to three months. Many respondents stated that they occasionally received money from friends who had previously been in the camp and had since resettled. It was also interesting to note that two respondents were sent money from relatives living in Vietnam. One-third of respondents received no money from overseas, generally because they had no relatives living in a Western country. Nam muoi chin and Bay muoi both claimed that they borrowed money from friends in the camp, which they would repay after they had resettled. Three respondents who did not receive money operated shops in their billets to generate income.
Money was generally remitted either by cash or bank cheque and exchanged at the bureau-de-change operated by CADP in the PRPC administration building.\textsuperscript{35} There were also Filipino money-changers at the markets, and a couple of the more affluent Vietnamese market-sellers would exchange foreign currencies. Some refugees received remittances through bank-drafts to banks in Balanga or Mariveles: the two nearest major towns. Refugees were permitted to travel to these towns to obtain their money until a change of administrative policy in mid-1994 stopped refugees leaving the camp, even to obtain money. Although it is estimated that only a small number of refugees were affected by this policy shift, it was an unfortunate restriction that adversely affected the lives of some refugees in the camp.

**Water**

Water was not connected to the refugee billets, so refugees had to cart water from taps at nearby ablution blocks. Most, but not all, billets stored water in a large metal drum situated near the back door, with some refugees keeping a second drum in the wash-room.\textsuperscript{36} Drinking water was usually boiled beforehand, and this was stored in a smaller container: often a plastic jerry can. As an energy-saving measure to save fuel, most refugees boiled water on the charcoal stoves after cooking their meals and kept the hot water in thermos flasks for drinking tea during the day or evening.

The water supply was only available for two hours in the morning and afternoon: generally between 6:00 and 8:00 a.m. and again between 4:00 and 6:00 p.m. At times the water was only turned on in the afternoon, which was always an extremely busy time. Refugees, generally men, would place their buckets and jerry cans in a queue at the taps, wait their turn to fill the containers, then carry the containers and empty them into the drum in their billet. They would then return to the taps and repeat the process.

\textsuperscript{35} The Center for Assistance to Displaced Persons (CADP) was a voluntary agency run by a group of Catholic Bishops in the Philippines. It principally provided assistance to impoverished refugees and operated the licensed bureau-de-change.

\textsuperscript{36} Generally they were 44 gallon (or 200 litre) drums.
until the drum was full. Depending on water usage in the billet, drums were generally filled every second day.

Some refugees also collected rainwater that poured off the steeply pitched billet roofs during tropical downpours that frequently sweep the region. Buckets were placed under the roof to collect water, and then emptied into the larger drums. A couple of the more ingenious refugees had constructed bamboo gutters to direct water into storage drums below.

Only sixty per cent of respondents (65 persons) considered the water supply at RRTC to be adequate, including three who stated it was only sufficient if there was a container to store it in. Conversely, there were forty-three persons (39.8%) who considered the water supply inadequate. All but one had formerly been resident in Hong Kong, where there was a twenty-four hour supply of water (including hot water). The major complaint was the restricted availability of water. *Nam muoi sau* also complained that at times the water supply was interrupted, which forced him to obtain water from a polluted canal that ran near Neighbourhood Twelve. *Bay muoi bay* told how there was sometimes fighting between refugees when getting water, which required the intervention of the security guards.

**Electricity**

There was a single fluorescent light in both the ground and upper floors of every billet. Although there were no other power outlets in the billets, some refugees illegally tapped into the power supply. Electricity was supplied to the billets for three hours each night (6.30 to 9:30 p.m.), which was considered insufficient by almost half the respondents (43.9% or 50 persons). Ten respondents complained that there was not sufficient light to allow them to study at night. Again, this view was more common among former Hong Kong residents (40 persons)—where electricity was provided twenty-four hours a day—than among former Palawan residents.
Refugees generally had their own source of lighting for when the electricity was switched off. Some constructed makeshift lamps from coffee jars, with a cotton wick supported across the top by paper clips. The lamps burnt the petroleum spirit used in the stoves and gave off a low but warm glow. A more elaborate light used by some refugees was a fluorescent torch powered by a motorcycle battery. The batteries were illegally recharged each evening when the electricity was on, or in the food distribution centres, where electricity was available twenty-four hours a day.

Sanitation

Every four blocks of billets shared one ablution block. There were ten cubicles on each side, with each billet allocated one cubicle that had a "squat-style" toilet. It was the responsibility of each billet to keep their cubicle clean. There was a laundry area at each end of the ablution block for refugees to do their washing. This was also where refugees collected water each evening.

Almost three-quarters of respondents (74.1% or 28 persons) thought that the sanitation in the camp was satisfactory, although a number stated that conditions depended largely on the refugees themselves and whether they kept their area clean or not. Sau muoi hai and Sau muoi sau were among the twenty-eight respondents who thought that sanitation in the camp was unsatisfactory. Both complained that the administration did not provide any chemicals to clean the channels and toilets. Nam muoi sau also argued that there was not sufficient water to keep the area clean. Mosquitos were a major problem in the camp according to Nam muoi chin and Tam muoi bon. Bay muoi bon argued that the administration did not spray the camp to kill mosquitos. During the ten months of field work only one major initiative to clean up the camp was observed. The camp fire engine was brought in to use its hoses to clean the storm-water channels that ran through the camp and which had become clogged with litter.37

37 A system of concrete channels, with a concrete block on top, ran through the camp to rid the camp of stormwater. The topography of the camp allowed the channels to drain freely. A separate sewerage system emptied the ablution blocks.
Health Services

A full range of health services was available to refugees at the PRPC/RRTC. A hospital in the centre of the PRPC served the refugees and staff in the camp, as well as the local community in Morong. In addition, there was also a health clinic for refugees at RRTC. In medical emergencies patients were transferred to the district hospital at Balanga, or occasionally to Manila, in one of the camp’s ambulances. Various non-government organizations also provided specific medical assistance. Community and Family Services International (CFSI) provided counselling to refugees and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) conducted medical examinations and provided inoculations on behalf of resettlement countries.

Almost one-fifth of respondents (18 persons or 16.7%) stated that they could not comment on the medical services because they had never been in the camp hospital or clinic. There was reluctance among refugees to seek professional assistance for illnesses for the fear that it would delay departure. This unwillingness was pointed out by four respondents, including Tam muoi bay, who claimed

the refugee does not want to obtain medicine from the hospital because they are afraid they would get a problem with their documents. For example, if they could not sleep or have a headache, and ask for medicine from the hospital, they would have to have a medical with CFSI. This could affect their resettlement.

Ninety respondents made comments on the health services in the camp, and sixty-seven commented favourably about the facilities. They generally claimed that the facilities were good, and that it was easy to be examined by the doctor or nurse. However, there were twenty-three persons critical of the health services provided at RRTC. Nam muoi tam stated it was difficult to see a doctor, and they had to wait a long

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38 Community and Family Services International (CFSI) is a Hong Kong-based non-government organization that was responsible for counselling and treating any refugees with mental health problems. They employed psychologists and psychiatrists, and trained refugees as para-professionals. The organization gained a bad reputation in the camp among refugees as a result of working closely with the American Joint Voluntary Agency (JVA) that ran the ODP in the camp. The U.S. Refugee Coordinator insisted that CFSI provide information about fraudulent cases to JVA. When CFSI counselled a refugee they provided JVA with background information on the refugee, and highlighted cases that needed “administrative attention” for JVA to further investigate. Consequently, refugees were loath to be counselled by CFSI as they thought it would adversely affect their resettlement opportunities.
time if they wanted medicine. *Mot muoi chin* complained that the doctors did not tell them anything about their illnesses. *Bon muoi ba* and *bon muoi sau* both argued that the doctors and nurses did not care about sick Vietnamese. A common criticism was that refugees were not provided with sufficient medicine. Both *Ba muoi nam* and *Nam muoi mot* complained that the hospital did not provide enough medicine to refugees, and five respondents, including *Tam muoi nam* and *Mot tram bay*, stated that they had to buy their own medicine.

**Educational Facilities**

The principal education provider at the RRTC was the International Social Service (ISS) organization. ISS offered three instructional programs: the *Huong Vuong* School (primary and secondary); an adult language program; and vocational courses, with each program containing English language and cultural instruction components. ISS predominantly employed Filipinos, who generally had an excellent command of the English language, and occasionally expatriate volunteers for teaching. The ISS office occupied a block of converted billets in Neighbourhood Twelve, with another block housing a small library and other educational facilities. Classes were conducted in one of the numerous concrete classrooms distributed widely throughout the two neighbourhoods.

The *Huong Vuong* Primary School provided education for children aged between six and eleven years, who were placed into classes according to their age and English proficiency. They attended class for eighty minutes per day, five days per week for a twelve-week term. Students studied English, Maths, Science, Social Studies, Art, Music and Physical Education. Children aged between twelve and sixteen years attended the secondary classes for four hours per day, five days per week, for a twelve-week term. They studied English, Maths, Science, Social Studies and Literature.

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39 The International Social Service, Hung Vuong, Inc. (ISS) in the Philippines is an organization jointly funded by UNHCR and a Dutch charity organization through ISS Hong Kong.

40 In ISS, volunteers were paid the same rate as the Filipino workers, unlike in some other NGOs where they received a larger salary.

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The Adult Language Program was designed for refugees aged between seventeen and fifty-five years. Classes were conducted for two hours per day, five days a week, for twelve weeks, with students receiving instruction in English as a Second Language (ESL) or English as a Foreign Language (EFL).  

It was apparent from the field study that relatively few of the former Hong Kong respondents had managed to learn English to any degree prior to arriving at the RRTC. Only one TC respondent was capable of responding to the interview questions in English, whereas at least six RS respondents answered in English and a number of others possessed good English skills. This difference in language ability was a reflection of the facilities available in the different first asylum countries. At Palawan there was an abundance of teaching facilities and personnel for asylum-seekers to learn English and other languages, while in Hong Kong these facilities were restricted to children. A number of the former Palawan residents had progressed to the highest level of instruction available in the camp.

Education at the RRTC was considered good or very good by the vast majority of respondents, with ninety-three respondents (86.1%) approving of the educational facilities in the camp. This included ten persons who commented that education was better at the RRTC than in Hong Kong. Refugees such as Nam muoi sau stated that ISS encouraged people to go to school, while Bon muoi bon mentioned that ISS helped those wanting to learn English. Five respondents commented that it was easy to enrol in classes. In contrast, fifteen people argued that education at the RRTC was unsatisfactory, including three who thought the programs were better at the PFAC. The major complaint was about the teaching. Tam muoi bon and Tam muoi nam both complained about the teaching, arguing that the Filipino teachers only taught in English, even though many students could not speak English. Consequently, they could not
understand the classes. Others, such as Mot muoi lam and Ba muoi complained that the teachers taught without any plan.

**Cultural Orientation Classes**

Refugees resettling to the major resettlement countries such as Australia, Canada and America attended Cultural Orientation (CO) classes to prepare for resettlement. Teachers provided information on many facets of life in resettlement countries that were applicable to refugees, such as the social security system, migrant resource centres and language instruction for migrants.

The Australian program, taught by volunteers, was an informal affair and not compulsory, although some Australian teachers argued that the program should have been more rigid, and attendance compulsory. Despite the valiant attempts of the teachers, it suffered acutely from insufficient resources. The Australian CO program was a poorly organised program compared with the Canadian and American CO programs, which contained far more material and were compulsory. The Australian program ceased in July 1994 when the last teacher returned to Australia.

It is unfortunate that the Australian government did not provide adequate resources for cultural orientation programs in this and other camps. The transit period is an ideal time to provide essential education to refugees before they arrive in the resettlement country, when conflicting demands make it harder to attend such courses. It would be much easier to deliver information to a "captive" audience in a camp who have little else to occupy their time, than to a widely distributed refugee population in

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42 Many of the volunteers were spouses of Australian Embassy personnel in Manila.

43 American cultural orientation was an intensive six month program of language instruction and cultural orientation at the PRPC (mainly for persons in the ODP). Refugees were required to attend classes for four hours per day, six days a week. Attendance was compulsory, and if refugees were absent for more than three classes without adequate excuse, they were made to attend the subsequent cycle of classes. Refugees were not permitted to resettle until they had completed the cycle. This program appeared to be an excellent example of a cultural educational endeavour.

44 It was rumoured that senior Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs bureaucrats were reluctant to spend Australian dollars overseas on this work.
Australian cities who have competing time demands. It would probably also be far more cost effective in the camps than in Australia.

**Vocational Training**

Refugees were able to obtain vocational skills by undertaking training courses operated by non-government organizations in the camp. Teachers were more likely to be expatriate, especially American, although some Filipinos were also involved. Courses included home economics, typing, tailoring, auto-mechanics, construction, computing and driving instruction. Some courses, such as the driving instruction, were only available to those who had completed higher levels of English, while others, such as tailoring and home economics were available to everyone.

Vocational training classes received almost universal approval from respondents questioned. Only two refugees—Mot tram bon and Mot tram bay—were critical of the programs, both stating that the training programs at Palawan were better. A third respondent approved of the programs, but complained that the computer equipment used in the training programs was obsolete.

**Recreation Facilities**

There was an absence of organized recreation opportunities available to refugees, especially women, at the RRTC. Most activities were organised by refugees themselves, and they usually had to supply their own equipment. Late every afternoon there was a rush of activity among young male refugees playing soccer and volleyball. There was a single volleyball court in Neighbourhood Twelve, where a group of young men would gather every afternoon to play energetic and entertaining games on the hard clay court. Soccer was the most popular sport, with numerous groups kicking a ball around on the roads. There was also a makeshift soccer pitch in Neighbourhood Eleven where groups played competitive matches. Mot muoi mot claimed that there were

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45 Southern Baptist Missionaries—an American Christian organization—was the major provider of training courses at the PRPC/RRTC. Other courses were provided by ISS and the Church of the Latter Day Saints.
occasionally sporting competitions between Neighbourhoods Eleven and Twelve in volleyball and soccer. There were also two table tennis tables—one in each neighbourhood.

The only night-time entertainment for refugees was a "movie theatre" that showed video tapes every evening in the Neighbourhood Twelve food distribution centre. The theatre was privately run by a group of refugees, who charged two pesos admission. The sides of the theatre, which were open during the day, were curtained-off by sheets of hessian strung between the concrete pillars. Refugees would bring their own chairs and stools to sit on. Outside the theatre, a young Vietnamese girl sold cigarettes and candy.

ISS had a library for refugees to borrow books and magazines, but according to Mot tram tam there were not enough books or magazines to read. Bay muoi ba complained that the magazines and books were mainly in English, and there were very few in Vietnamese, which made it difficult for those who could not read English.

The highlight of the Vietnamese year is Tet, and this was widely celebrated by refugees at the RRTC. There were numerous parties throughout the camp, as well as some formal entertainment. The refugees organised a concert on the stage in Neighbourhood Eleven that included singing, a band and an ao-dai contest. The concert was carried over into a second night because of power problems. This was the only night where the camp curfew was not enforced.

Another major event in the Vietnamese calendar is the mid-autumn festival (Tet Trung Thu—or August moon). ISS organised a number of activities for the school children during this festival, including kite flying and lantern-making. They organised a contest among the general refugee population to construct the most elaborate lantern, and offered a cash prize. This saw groups of Vietnamese labour day and night for more than a week to construct lanterns from wood, wire and coloured paper that resembled

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46 Ao-dai are the traditional costume of Vietnamese women, and consists of a close fitting blouse with long panels in the front and back that is worn over loose trousers.
fish, boats, trucks and more traditional Vietnamese designs. The highlight of the festival was an evening gathering of refugees in the Catholic Church in Phase II, followed by a candle-lit procession back down to the RRTC.

A number of external excursions were organised for groups of refugees, until a clampdown on activities in July 1994. For example, some cultural orientation teachers organised excursions to Morong beach for their pupils at the completion of the courses and CFSI volunteers organised an excursion to Mt. Samat for the unaccompanied minors in the camp.47

Almost half the respondents questioned (44.4% or 48 persons) commented that there was a lack of recreation facilities in the camp. Many of the former Hong Kong residents complained that there were no television sets, as there had been in each section of the Hong Kong detention centres. The majority simply commented that it was possible to play soccer, volleyball and table tennis in the camp, although relatively few actually participated in these activities.

Postal Service

Both the PRPC and the RRTC were served by a single post office, a branch of the Philippines Postal Service. Letters were sorted upon arrival according to neighbourhoods and whether ordinary or registered mail. Registered letters were collected by neighbourhood officials, who then issued “call slips” for refugees to collect it. The PROC OSS office made a list of “ordinary” mail recipients, which was displayed in neighbourhood notice boards. Recipients would then obtain their letters from the PROC OSS office. As mentioned previously, the postal system was an important link in the lives of many refugees, especially those who received remittances from overseas. However, the majority of respondents (90 persons or 83.3%) were critical of the postal service in the camp, with only sixteen claiming the service was good. Two respondents did not know about the postal service, as they never received letters.

47 Mt Samat is a mountain on the Bataan peninsula, location of the infamous Bataan Death March during the Second World War. Atop the mountain is a 90 metre tall cross commemorating all those who died during the War.
The principal complaints were that the service was slow, and that letters were frequently lost. Respondents claimed that the service was irregular, and that it took between one and four weeks for letters to be delivered. *Chin muoi bay* was one of the thirty-four respondents who claimed that the service was slow. He stated that two relatives wrote him letters—one at the beginning of the month and the other at the end of the month—and they both arrived at the same time. *Chin muoi tam* claimed that it took one month for a letter to arrive from Hong Kong. Thirty-two respondents claimed that they lost letters, or the money enclosed in a letter was missing. *Tam muoi bon* alleged that one friend had written him four letters, but he had received only one. *Mot tram tam* claimed that his letters always appeared to have been opened, and then stuck again with tape. He also questioned what happened to a refugee's letters that arrived in the camp after that the refugee had departed, inferring that the postal workers kept them. A few refugees organised to have their letters sent to a Catholic priest in Manila, who would then deliver the letters to the refugees personally in the camp. This was regarded as a much safer method of delivery when money was enclosed. Even some of the Filipino workers in the camp complained that they lost letters in the post.

**Religious facilities**

Various facilities for the major religions were available in the PRPC complex. 48 The largest structure was the Catholic church, built next to the hospital in the centre of the PRPC, which was used by refugees and camp staff. Sunday services were conducted in Vietnamese, English and Tagalog. On the southern edge of the PRPC, adjoining Neighbourhood Ten, were a Buddhist pagoda and a *Cao Dai* temple. There was also a small Baptist church in the middle of Neighbourhood Ten. The Catholic church and the Buddhist pagoda were both frequently visited by refugees, especially on special occasions. Catholic and Baptist clergy were assigned to the camp, and other priests

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48 Geiger (1994:297) reported that earlier, there had been "two Catholic, two evangelistic Protestant churches, and one Mormon church in the camp. There were also two Buddhist temples, one primarily Khmer and one Vietnamese, one Lao temple, and a Cao Dai temple. Two billets in one building in Neighbourhood Eight were given to the Hoa Hao."
occasionally visited from Manila. There was only one visit by a Buddhist monk during 1994, and apparently no visits by Cao Dai clergy.

**Work-Credit Scheme**

All adult refugees were expected to contribute to the running of the camp by volunteering their labour in a work-credit scheme. Refugees were required to work two hours per day in some capacity in the camp. They would work in the food distribution network, for the neighbourhood council, as teaching assistants, translators or cleaners in the NGO and the RRTC offices, or as billet leaders. Theoretically, refugees would have to have their refugee card signed by an PRPC/RRTC official declaring that they had fulfilled their work obligations in an agency or the RRTC office before they could depart. However, this does not appear to have been strictly enforced.

**Neighbourhood Councils**

All refugee and asylum camps in the Philippines, with the exception of the PRTC, operated "neighbourhood councils" to assist the camp administration with the management of the residential areas and the provision of services to refugees. The two RRTC neighbourhoods were represented by their neighbourhood council, with each council comprising an elected neighbourhood leader, an assistant leader, and food, mail, peace-and-order representatives. In addition there were appointed representatives for sanitation, women's affairs, information and socio-cultural affairs.

**Summary of the RRTC**

Most respondents were pleased to be living at the RRTC. Almost three-quarters of respondents (73.1% or 79 persons) stated that the RRTC was better than their previous camp (Table 7.2). Importantly, all but two RS refugees preferred living in the

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49 Single mothers with young children to look after were excused from work-credit.

50 Some refugees were admonished by the PRPC staff for not fulfilling their work-credit requirements, but they were not withheld from resettling.

51 The "neighbourhood councils" were modelled on the Filipino barangay form of local government.
RRTC than at Palawan, with most claiming that everything was better at the RRTC than the PFAC.

Forty-one respondents (38.0%) considered the educational and training facilities to be the best facilities at the RRTC, followed by security (25 respondents or 23.1%). Twelve respondents (11.1%) merely claimed that everything in the camp was good, while two respondents claimed that there was nothing good. Interestingly, nine respondents (8.3%) claimed that the best part of the camp was their mental state.

Table 7.2
Respondents' Opinions of the RRTC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country where Refugee Status was granted</th>
<th>Superior to First Asylum Camp</th>
<th>Equal to First Asylum Camp</th>
<th>Inferior to First Asylum Camp</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Philippines (RS)</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong (TC)</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field study, 1994

However, not everyone was impressed with the RRTC. Almost twenty per cent of respondents (18.5% or 20 persons) stated they preferred living at their former camp than at the RRTC (Table 7.2). Former Hong Kong (TC) respondents complained that facilities such as food, water and electricity were worse at the RRTC than in Hong Kong. A further nine respondents claimed that the camps were about equal, with some aspects better at the previous camp, and some facilities, especially housing, better at the RRTC. This opinion was best articulated by Mot tram tam, who stated “every camp has good things and bad things”. He argued that in Hong Kong they were given all the provisions necessary for living in the camp, but there was no freedom because they were surrounded by fences. In contrast, the housing was more spacious at the RRTC, and refugees were more contented living there.

It was difficult to ascertain what was the worst element of the RRTC as forty-eight respondents (44.4%) either didn’t provide a response or answered “nothing”. Twenty-four of the sixty persons who did respond considered the postal system to be the
poorest facility in the camp. This was followed by the rations (7 persons), fighting (6 persons), and water supply (5 persons). In addition, four respondents commented that the worst part about the camp was the time spent waiting for resettlement.

**REFUGEE BEHAVIOUR IN THE CAMP**

Most refugees at the RRTC recognised that they had overcome the greatest hurdle to resettlement (obtaining refugee status), and that their stay in this camp was only a brief sojourn before they would leave for one of the resettlement countries. The transitory nature of the camp was recognised by many refugees, such as *Bay muoi bon*, who commented "life here is only temporary". Refugees often spoke of a different outlook on life at the RRTC. For example, *Bon* commented "when I was transferred my spirit increased. I had a chance for resettlement and didn't fear repatriation to Vietnam.” This attitude was mentioned by a number of other respondents, including *Chin muoi nam*, who claimed that "at Hong Kong I was always thinking about my future, and was frightened that I would be forced back to Vietnam. But at the RRTC my mind is more relaxed—I am only waiting for resettlement and not being repatriated.” *Nam muoi mot* thought the RRTC was "heaven" in comparison to his detention in Hong Kong, where he claimed he was treated like an animal.

Knudsen (1983:iv) claimed that the PRPC was a “waiting room”, and this euphemism is equally applicable to the RRTC. Life at the RRTC continued to resolve around waiting—for the immigration delegations from the resettlement countries to visit the camp so that they could be interviewed, for the outcome of the resettlement interviews, medical and other checks, and finally for their departure details. In fact, waiting at the RRTC may have been more tiresome than at the PRPC because refugees were not required to attend the compulsory education and orientation classes that the PRPC refugees were required to attend. Geiger’s (1994) research on refugees at the PRPC described refugees with busy and regimented schedules attending classes and undertaking work. However, because refugees at the RRTC were not involved with intensive education and cultural orientation classes, the situation was far more relaxed.
English classes were optional for all refugees, and many refugees, particularly those from the PFAC, had completed the highest levels, and many of the vocational classes. Furthermore, many former Hong Kong refugees elected not to undertake English classes in the camp. Many of the RRTC refugees had little to do during the day but wait. The only requirement of refugees was two hours of work-credit. Some refugees enjoyed this requirement as it gave them something to do for the day.

For many respondents, however, especially those accepted for resettlement, the waiting at the RRTC was even more infuriating than in their previous camps. They knew they were very close to resettlement and were only waiting for some small detail to be finalised before they would leave the camp forever. Many became despondent when they saw refugees who had arrived after them, resettle before them. They could not understand why this final stage of their journey took so long. *Tam muoi bon* mentioned that refugees worried about waiting a long time—not knowing when they would resettle to a third country. Consequently, he claimed, “we have to endure living a miserable life in the camp”. There were, unfortunately, many instances where the waiting dragged out endlessly. A number of individuals were required to complete medical treatment before they could resettle, which added a further term on their—and their family’s—“sentence”. Some refugees, especially those with serious medical conditions, could not find a country that would accept them and were rejected for resettlement by one country after the other and appeared doomed for a life in limbo.

The departure of close friends, especially those with whom they had shared many experiences, often left refugees disconsolate and feeling alone in the camp. *Bon* mentioned that he was both happy and sad when his “biletmate” left for Canada—happy for her because she was leaving, but sad that such a close friend was leaving him and that they may not see each other again.

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52 The main delay for medical reason was to complete a course of treatment for tuberculosis, which required a daily dose of medication for six months—or until the illness had cleared.
It was evident that refugees' attitude and behaviour in the camp varied considerably, depending on whom they were dealing with. Whereas the Vietnamese were usually joyful and boisterous interacting with each other, they invariably adopted a submissive role when dealing with camp administrative staff. For example, they became quiet and extremely respectful when speaking to the RRTC staff. The refugees had learnt over the years, both from their experiences in Vietnam and in refugee camps, that it was best to adopt a respectful manner when dealing with people in authority. Refugees would not infuriate camp personnel, because those people could create further problems and thus delays with their resettlement. Knudsen (1990:155) stated that refugees had learned that "silence was a safer strategy than speech". He added:

From the camp dwellers' point of view, silence and withdrawal is justified as a safer coping strategy than extrovert behavior and self-presentation through psychotherapy. Thus personal problems continue to be internalized or discussed with persons with whom the individual feels safe ... the individual seeks to conceal problems through self-control; at stake is not only the right of asylum, but also the integrity of the individual and the honor of the family.

This demeanour was evident when Bon, a young single Vietnamese male who was rejected by Australia because of minor health problems, was summoned to the CFSI office. Bon thought he had been sent to CFSI by the UNHCR Resettlement Officer to discuss his rejection and his future. Bon recalled how he was asked a series of potentially hostile questions. However, he remained exceptionally calm during the interview and answered all questions very diplomatically. If he had lost his temper during the interview it is quite likely that CFSI would have further investigated his case—perhaps requiring him to have a full psychiatric examination. However, because of his responses and the "cool" manner in which he responded, Bon was dismissed without the need for further action. It was quite remarkable to hear how this young refugee coped with the pressures, and how he purposely set out not to "ruffle any feathers".

Another sign of respect was in the dress of the Vietnamese, particular among the men. The males frequently dressed in shorts and were bare-chested (or sometimes a
singlet) when they were in their own billets. Whenever they received a visitor of some importance (even the researcher), they would immediately put on a shirt as a sign of respect. If they were called to the administration office they would quickly dress in their best attire. This was witnessed when visiting Hai tram ba, who was unexpectedly told to report to the UNHCR office. He had been sitting in shorts and T-shirt, but quickly went upstairs and dressed in his “Sunday best”—white shirt, long trousers and shoes.

Many refugees stated that one of the worst aspects of being in the refugee camps was the mind— and not knowing where you were going or when, or even if you would go. Tam muoi bon mentioned that refugees worried about the long time they waited, not knowing when they would resettle to a third country, and having to endure a miserable life living in the camp.

Bouts of depression were a recurring aspect of refugee life noticeable among some Vietnamese. It is likely that most refugees suffer some depression during their stay in camp and it is quite plausible that the longer a person stays, the more often it occurs, and the deeper the depression becomes as their future for resettlement becomes bleaker. As mentioned previously, refugees were loath to seek professional assistance for problems such as depression from CFSI, as any treatment could have an adverse affect on their resettlement and could in effect keep them in the camp even longer.

Depression could strike extremely quickly, with a refugee in a jolly mood one night, and in a “black” mood the following night. This mood swing was observed with Hai tram mot, a usually vibrant and jovial fellow, after he was accepted for resettlement by the Australian delegation in February 1994. However, when all the other refugees were summoned for medical examinations the following week, his name did not appear on the list. Hai tram mot could not understand why his name was left off the list and became severely depressed. He was visibly distraught by not being on the list and started saying that maybe he should apply elsewhere (even though he had a mother, sister and two brothers already in Australia). He said that he would apply everywhere else—America, Canada, even Sweden. It took some time for Hai tram mot to recover from this bout of depression.
A refugee’s rejection for resettlement could have a traumatic impact on the individual, as the case of Chang Kinh Phi illustrates. Phi was a thirty-seven year old former farmer from northern Vietnam who had applied for resettlement to Canada. In early April 1994 he received a letter from the Canadian Embassy, informing him that his family had been rejected for resettlement following the medical examination, as his wife was diagnosed as a schizophrenic. The letter stated “she ‘might reasonably be expected to place excessive demand’ on Canadian welfare services” (Walsh, 1994:40). On 17 April, Phi told his family to go for a walk, and then shut all the windows in the upstairs loft of his billet. He then poured four litres of petrol over himself and ignited it—killing himself. Refugees claimed that the UNHCR Resettlement Officer had told Chang Kinh Phi that he should go back to Vietnam. A number of refugees were angry that there was no one from CFSI to assist the bereaved family after the incident.

This unfortunate incident illustrates the extreme stress that refugees can be subjected to, and their need for counselling. Unfortunately, the camp staff were rarely active in anticipating the needs of refugees, but instead tended to be slow-acting and reactionary. It may have been beneficial for those who were rejected for resettlement to be counselled by CFSI at the time they received their rejection.

Another source of stress was from “rumours” that often circulated around the camp about the status of an individual refugee’s resettlement application. While not all were factual, some were, fuelled by refugees working in one of the offices. An example of this arose in the case of Bon, who became distressed upon hearing rumours that Australia had rejected him. Investigations by the researcher revealed that a refugee working in the IOM office had found out that Bon had been rejected for resettlement to Australia on medical grounds and had begun telling other refugees.53 The rumour spread quickly, and the situation was made worse by IOM not notifying Bon of his rejection. This example illustrates a number of flaws in the camp system that caused

53 IOM, which was responsible for medical matters relating to resettlement, received the medical report and the rejection note back from the Australian government.
stress to refugees: some refugees’ access to sensitive information; the lack of confidentiality with that information; work procedures in NGO offices; the slowness of official channels; and the lack of counselling provided to refugees when needed.

There were occasional outbursts of violence among the refugees in the camp. However, the level of violence at the RRTC was relatively low, and according to various refugees, lower than at the PRPC. The higher incidence of assaults among the PRPC residents is attributed to the ODP Amerasians who had their resettlement stalled—or even rejected—and subsequently caused considerable disruption in the camp. Mot tram hai commented that many of the Amerasians were “trouble-makers” who had lost their direction. In contrast, he believed that refugees at the RRTC knew they were close to resettling, and were loath to disrupt this. Consequently, he claimed refugees like him were much better behaved. The PRPC staff told stories of gangs previously operating in the camp, who were involved in theft, armed robbery and extortion from their fellow refugees. An examination of some old security records noted that some of the PRPC refugees had been imprisoned for assaults, rapes and even a murder. Violence at the RRTC was very uncommon. One incident that did occur during field work was an assault on a middle-aged Vietnamese woman by a person she shared her billet with. The woman was due for resettlement the following week, and apparently asked for the money she had lent her “billet-mate” to be returned. He refused to repay the woman, and instead assaulted her. It was also alleged that the assailant bribed security officials not to investigate the offence until after the woman had left the camp.

54 Mot tram hai was the step-father of an Amerasian woman in Phase II, who offered some insights into the Amerasian trouble-makers. He claimed that there was frequently trouble between Amerasians and their family. He claimed that Amerasians in Vietnam often caused problems: stole, spent money, drank and generally made trouble. He estimated that between 50% and 70% of Amerasians in the camp made trouble and accused the females of being as bad as the males. He also claimed that Amerasians often blackmailed their family—they often requested “big” money from their family, and if refused would get angry and tell JVA that they wanted to split from their family, which would create resettlement problems for the family.

55 There were numerous “stories” of refugee gangs prowling the camp, especially at night, preying on fellow refugees. They would attack refugees who had recently received money from overseas, or threaten refugees who were about to resettle with serious assault, that would interfere with their departure, unless they paid money.
The Daily Routine

The waiting in the camp was often exacerbated by the lack of activities. There was relatively little for the refugees to do to occupy their time during the day, apart from the work-credit requirement and education programs. However, most of the adult refugees elected not to attend education classes.

A few of the more energetic refugees awoke early and went for a morning run or walk at dawn. They would run along the road between the RRTC and the PRPC administration centre—a distance over two kilometres—or perhaps even further up into Phase I. The markets attracted considerable activity in the mornings, as refugees bought additional food or for the few Vietnamese vendors that sold goods. It was generally advisable to get to the markets early, to get the best meat or vegetables. Many refugees had various work commitments during the morning, and worked in an NGO office or classroom, or were involved with the distribution of food. Others were busy during the late morning preparing their midday meals.

There was far less activity among refugees after lunch, especially during the hot summer months. Most refugees stayed inside during this period, often having a siesta. There was frequently a hammock stretched out in most billets, which was a favourite retreat, as the concrete floor in the billet provided a cool respite from the heat. Many of the refugee men became active in the late afternoon, as they filled their water containers or played sports. The women were often inside beginning to prepare the evening meal. During the evening many refugees walked around the camp in the pleasant tropical air. Some visited friends, or went to the movies, while others just strolled around.

SHEPHERDS TO PARADISE

A considerable number of individuals worked in the PRPC/RRTC administration and for the various NGOs in the camp. These organizations frequently played a major role in the lives of refugees and could perhaps be best described as the shepherds that guided refugees to paradise.
The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) is contracted by UNHCR to undertake two important roles in the camp: the medical examination of refugees, and the organization of travel arrangements for refugees—both incoming and outgoing. IOM conducted medical examinations on behalf of the resettlement countries shortly after the refugees were accepted for resettlement. Medical reports were subsequently forwarded to respective embassies for them to examine. The medical officer at IOM also treated refugees diagnosed with tuberculosis. Thirty respondents claimed that IOM had diagnosed a health problem in their case, with half of these being tuberculosis. IOM also provided inoculations to refugees shortly before departure, and performed a cursory medical examination immediately before departure.

The second role was to arrange travel for refugees. The Manila office of IOM received notification from the various resettlement embassies of refugees approved for resettlement. They subsequently made the necessary travel arrangements and compiled lists of refugees to depart the PRPC/RRTC on specific days to different destinations. This information was then forwarded to the IOM office at the RRTC, which distributed a copy to the PROCOSS office.

Some problems were evident in the IOM administration. In one case a refugee had been waiting a considerable time for resettlement to Australia. When the refugee questioned the delay he discovered that his medical records had been sent to the American Embassy and not to the Australian Embassy. In another known case the IOM was extremely slow in sending medical records to immigration officials at the Australian Embassy, taking more than three weeks after a medical re-examination for the medical file to be delivered to the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs (DIEA) office in Manila.

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56 This also exposes deficiencies with the operations of the Australian Embassy in Manila. In this case they should have picked up that there was no medical report on the refugee and pressured IOM for the file.
THE PRPC/RRTC ADMINISTRATION

The PRPC/RRTC complex was a major employment and income generation project in a poor region of the country, funded predominantly by international sources. Only Filipinos were employed by the PRPC and the RRTC, while the NGOs employed both expatriate and Filipino staff. Employment with camp agencies provided above-average remunerations to Filipinos, often more than similar positions in Manila. In addition, employees and their families were provided with free accommodation and a rice allowance. Locals benefitted from employment opportunities in the camp, the supply of goods to the camp, and business transactions with the refugees in the camp and with staff in Morong and in the camp.57

Unfortunately, it appeared that many Filipinos working in the camp had little altruistic feeling towards the Vietnamese and considered their role in the camp to be purely financial. Many Filipinos often made derogatory comments about the refugees. It was also evident that some were jealous of the Vietnamese and resented the fact that persons less educated and with fewer ties than themselves were resettling to America. Some argued that there were many Amer-Filipinos in the country who did not have the benefit of Orderly Departure Programs.58 The attitude of some officials towards the refugees was at times abhorrent. It was evident that some officials were poorly equipped to perform their duties in the camp. Notwithstanding this, there were also a number of Filipino employees who were extremely kind and generous to the refugees they met.

Knudsen (1990:154) found that refugees often perceived camp management as a "system of sanctions" whose primary function was to keep them under control. The camp management was relatively inhumane in its dealing with the refugees. They

57 Gieger (1994:411) claimed that the refugees were an economic boost to the local community. He claimed that more than US$3 million dollars was converted by the Center for Assistance to Displaced Persons (CADP) for refugees between January 1988 and April 1990 and injected into the local economy. He estimated that private money changers would have converted an equal amount of money as CADP. In addition, there was a large injection of money into the local economy by camp staff—both local and expatriate.

58 There is a sizeable population of children in the Philippines who were fathered by U.S. servicemen previously stationed at U.S. bases in the country.
invariably considered refugees a number, and whenever a refugee was required to report anywhere, their RS/TC number was called over the camp loudspeaker.

Expatriate NGO staff worked in the camp for a variety of reasons—religious duty, altruism, and even personal gain. Although there were relatively few expatriates working in the PRPC/RRTC complex in 1994 compared to previous years, most had a considerable amount of interaction with refugees, both work-related and socially. They were an important source of support in the refugee community, especially as resources in the camp declined.

GATEKEEPERS TO PARADISE

The refugees’ road to paradise was controlled by a series of gatekeepers, who determined which Vietnamese should be permitted to pass through certain checkpoints. The first gatekeepers were the immigration officials who determined refugee status in the first asylum camps and detention centres, as was discussed previously in Chapter 6. These officials controlled the movement of boat people from asylum camps and detention centres to the refugee camps. For those who did succeed obtaining refugee status, there were a number of other gatekeepers operating at the RRTC.

UNHCR RESETTLEMENT OFFICE

One of the first gatekeepers encountered by refugees after arriving at the RRTC were officials from the UNHCR. These officials interviewed all newly-arrived cases, collected relevant data on each case, and made representations to resettlement countries for refugees to be interviewed regarding resettlement. The Resettlement Officer was a powerful position in the camp hierarchy, dictating considerable control on refugees’ future directions. It had the added prestige of being a UNHCR position.59

59 There was a hierarchy of agencies working in the camp, and the UNHCR was the most prestigious organization.
There were a number of accusations of misconduct directed against one of the UNHCR officials during field work. Two volunteer NGO-workers personally complained about this official’s conduct to the UNHCR head office in Manila during 1994, but the complaints were apparently ignored and the person continued to work in the camp until its closure. Two refugees discussed this official’s misconduct during interviews and again during later conversations, accusing the resettlement officer of accepting bribes to place people’s names on lists to be interviewed by visiting delegations. They also accused the person of “playing favourites”, by allowing some people to be interviewed by delegations, but refusing others interviews.

It became apparent from interviews with refugees and volunteers in the camp that officials in Resettlement Office did not know the correct procedures for the different resettlement countries. An Australian volunteer working in the camp reported that an official had told one refugee that the individual would have to pay the airfare to Australia—a totally incorrect statement. There were also two known cases where an official had required refugees to obtain sponsorship in Australia before they could be interviewed by Australian authorities.\(^{60}\) Nam muoi hai and Hai muoi bon both alleged that an official refused to allow their families to apply for resettlement to Australia because they had not obtained sponsorship by a person in Australia. They were both forced to apply for resettlement to Canada, and were subsequently rejected. The UNHCR official’s action caused considerable distress to the refugees during the application process with Canada—especially upon their rejection. Furthermore, it extended their families stay in the camp by six months. Similar stories were also told by Bay muoi bay, Bay muoi tam and Tam muoi bay.

Officials within the UNHCR Resettlement Office determined what country refugees would apply to for resettlement. The selection was based primarily on whether the PRA (or other family member) had a relative living in a resettlement country. If

\(^{60}\) Sponsorship, although desirable, is not essential for resettlement to Australia. If a person cannot obtain sponsorship then the Australian government will use the Community Refugee Settlement Scheme (CRSS).
there were no relatives in a third country, then a country would be selected by the Resettlement Officer. When a person had relatives in more than one country, there was no preference sought from the refugee. For example, Hai tram bay had relatives in both the United States and Australia, and the family wanted to go the former. However, the Resettlement Officer insisted that the family apply for Australia. At the resettlement interview, Hai tram bay told the immigration officer that they did not want to go to Australia, and wanted to be rejected. The immigration officer obliged the refugee’s request—the only known case in 1994 where a person was rejected at the interview. In such instances, it was unfortunate that refugees were not given some say in their future. The UNHCR officer only wasted everyone’s time in forcing refugees to apply to countries they did not want to settle in.

It was also evident that the Resettlement Officer rarely informed refugees about the progress of their case. There was one example of a young Vietnamese man who thought he was going to resettle to Switzerland. However, he was quite bewildered when he found out that he was leaving for New Zealand, a country he had never heard of. While it would have been impossible to inform all refugees about the status of their cases, it would not have taken much effort to inform a refugee which country their name had been submitted to.

This is a prime example of how refugees’ lives were controlled by staff working in the RRTC. Refugees were not permitted to contribute to their own future, but were dictated to by officials.

**AUSTRALIAN DEPARTMENT OF IMMIGRATION AND ETHNIC AFFAIRS (DIEA)**

The next gatekeepers encountered by refugees were the representatives of the resettlement nations who interviewed them for resettlement. For those persons applying

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61 The name of the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs was changed on 8 March 1996 to the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs. However, the Department’s former name—that was in place at the time of field work—will be retained in this study.
for resettlement to Australia, this role was performed by officials from the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs based at the Australian Embassy in Manila.

Visits by delegations to the RRTC were important, albeit infrequent, occasions. Representatives from the Australian Embassy only visited the camp four times in 1994, generally for less than three days at a time. Three or four officials would generally interview approximately one hundred cases during their brief stay.

**The DIEA Interview**

Refugees were notified by the UNHCR the day before the interview was to occur. On the given day, all persons in the case would present themselves at the UNHCR office, where the interviews were conducted. It was an astonishing sight to see a crowd of men, women and children all dressed in their best attire, waiting nervously outside the office for their case to be called.

The interview by the Australian delegation was a relatively easy meeting compared with the exhaustive interviews conducted by some other governments. For example, refugees applying to the United States were often interviewed three times. In effect, they were re-screened for refugee status by the U.S. immigration officials. Refugees applying to the United States would spend days preceding their interview meticulously preparing their case, trying to ensure that they would not fail the interview. Refugees generally acknowledged that the United States conducted the most stringent interviews and was the most difficult country to be accepted for resettlement. Canada had a slightly less stringent, although still very strict procedure. Applicants to both these countries had to wait for weeks following their final interview before they were informed of the decision. In both countries, refugees could be accepted, rejected or in a few cases deferred and reinterviewed.

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62 The typical visit from the Australian delegation was to arrive around lunch time, stay for two nights, and then return to Manila after lunch on the third day.

63 Evidence that the United States re-screens refugees to determine whether they fulfill their requirements for refugee status was obtained from Ba tranh hai, who was rejected for resettlement to the United States. The letter from the U.S. Embassy stated “Your interview ... does not support your assertion of a well-founded fear of persecution ... The events, actions and surrounding circumstances ... do not constitute a credible concern for persecution”.

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Australian government officials in the Philippines had previously conducted vigorous interviews similar to the other resettlement countries. Some DIEA officials in other first asylum countries may have even conducted more difficult interviews at that time. However, interviews in the Philippines during 1994 were very brief and straightforward. Refugees presented their documents to the interviewers, who discussed the proposed resettlement. The main focus of the interview was whether the refugees had obtained sponsorship, or required the Australian government to arrange sponsorship through the Community Refugee Settlement Scheme (CRSS). After a few minutes, the refugees were advised that they were accepted for resettlement subject to health department clearance (discussed more fully below). The Australian delegation generally accepted all refugees who applied. Refugees would leave the UNHCR office overjoyed, jubilantly telling everyone they met on their way home that they had been accepted by Australia.

There are three main assumptions as to why Australia adopted this “easy” interview approach in 1994. First, some senior officials believed that it was not necessary to re-screen refugees for resettlement as they had already been screened for refugee status. Furthermore, the numbers of Vietnamese refugees seeking resettlement to Australia was on the decline, and below the quota set for the region. This meant that it was not necessary to be extremely selective for resettlement positions.

Second, the final decision for resettlement to Australia was actually based on health criteria rather than refugee status, and was more of an economic than a humanitarian decision. Australia was more willing to accept able-bodied refugees than disabled refugees, with the latter considered a potential drain on Australia’s medical purse.64

Third, Australia wanted to fulfil its obligations to the CPA early—before the “basket cases” were the only ones remaining. Australia did not want to be pressured

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64 In late 1994, the policy was changed so that there was a health-cost ceiling under which refugees would be accepted. At least two refugees known to the author were resettled under this ruling.
into accepting "undesirable" refugees, such as the disabled or drug-addicted refugees, that no other country wanted to accept. By fulfilling its obligation early, it would be easier for Australia to withstand the pressures from other countries, and in fact it could reverse the roles and pressure other countries that had not fulfilled their obligations to the CPA to accept the "problem" refugees.

Australian officials in the Philippines adopted a resettlement policy that was exceptionally beneficial to the refugees, and most respondents were grateful for this. The major complaint against the immigration officials was their isolation from the camp. They only spent about twelve days in the camp each year. Consequently, refugees could not question officials on the progress of their case during these visits. Their only recourse was to write letters to the officials at the embassy in Manila. However, these enquiries invariably went unanswered.

More than half of the respondents (55.6%) had been interviewed by DIEA more than six months before the field survey interview. The average time between provisional acceptance and departure was 262 days—with the duration varying between 116 days (three cases) and 791 days. In this latter case of Bay muoi nam, the wait of more than two years was caused by the treatment of tuberculosis.

There were numerous cases identified during the field study where a refugee's stay in the camp had been extended without any plausible explanation. In a number of instances, after volunteers questioned the embassy about an unexplained delay, there was a sudden departure. It was obvious that the tyranny of distance between the RRTC and Manila (and also between Manila and Canberra) delayed the resettlement of some refugees.

Although the UNHCR Resettlement Officer had the major input on deciding what resettlement country a refugee could apply to, it was decided to ask respondents

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65 There was one instance known to the researcher where a Vietnamese teenager, an unaccompanied minor, left the camp without permission and travelled to the Australian Embassy in Manila to question an official about her case.

66 The survey interviews were conducted between 26 April and 2 September 1994.

67 The average was calculated on 72 respondents who resettled during the field study.
why they applied to resettle to Australia. The most frequent response (23.1%) was because the Australian government assisted refugees, closely followed by relatives and friends already living in Australia (21.3%) (Table 7.3). Typical of this latter group was Tam muoi hai, who was told by his father when he left Vietnam “if you pass the screening, you must apply to go to Australia, because you have an uncle there who will help you”. A significant number of respondents applied to Australia because they regarded it as a “free” nation with human rights (10%) or because it was a multicultural country with no discrimination (6%). A further six per cent replied that they applied because Australia was a humanitarian country.

Table 7.3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons for Applying to Australia</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australian government helps refugees</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>23.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relatives or friends living in Australia</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>21.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lifestyle and weather</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>18.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free nation with human rights</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multicultural country</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanitarian country</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rejected by other countries</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommended by AVS lawyer</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>108</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field study, 1994

Five respondents (4.6%) stated they applied to Australia because other countries had rejected them. Nam muoi chin told how he applied for Australia after the Canadian government had rejected him. He asked a UNHCR Resettlement Officer to let him apply to the country that came to the camp next, which happened to be Australia. One of the most interesting replies came from Mot tram bon:
I was thinking about applying to America or Australia. I thought Australia was a more peaceful country than America. And I convinced myself that I could not apply to America because I did not qualify. Anyway, the UNHCR Officer would not permit me to apply. Australia is one of the few countries that I can apply for. I just like to go to any free country.

APPLICATIONS TO OTHER COUNTRIES

Forty-two respondents previously made sixty-one applications for resettlement to other countries (and one had previously applied to Australia), but all had been rejected (Figure 7.7). Most applications had been made to (and rejected by) the United States (25 cases), followed by Canada (17 cases). Bon muoi tam had been rejected by the United States, Canada, France, Japan and Switzerland before he applied to Australia, while Hai muoi chin and Sau muoi bon had both been rejected by four countries previously.68

Respondents were seldom told why they had been rejected for resettlement to other countries. Cases such as Bay muoi sau were told that they had “not reached the standard for resettlement to the United States” or because they had insufficient documentation to prove refugee status. Mot tram ba was rejected by America and Canada because of mental problems. Twenty-one year old Ba, an unmarried mother, claimed she was rejected by Japan because she did not have a marriage certificate. Japan apparently rejected Mot tram tam because he was too old.69

An interesting case involved sixty-four year old Sau, and his wife and three children, who previously applied to New Zealand where his oldest son was living. He was rejected by New Zealand, so applied to Australia, and successfully resettled to Melbourne in May 1994. His son emigrated from New Zealand to Australia shortly afterwards.

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68 Hai muoi chin had applied to the United States, Canada, New Zealand and Sweden, while Sau muoi bon had applied to Canada, France, Japan and Switzerland.

69 Mot tram tam was 52 years of age.
RELATIVES IN AUSTRALIA

Slightly more than forty per cent (40.7% or 44 persons) of respondents had relatives living in Australia at the time of their application. The most numerous were distant relatives such as cousins (11 cases). Nine respondents had their spouses—seven husbands and two wives—already living in Australia and one woman had her ex-husband living in Sydney. There were eight cases with siblings who had already resettled, including Chin muoi mot who had seven siblings living in Melbourne. Eight respondents were resettling to Australia because their spouse’s relatives were already living there (three brother-in-laws, three sister-in-laws, one daughter-in-law and one wife’s cousin).
Sponsorship

Relatives already in Australia often sponsored their kin in the camps for resettlement. However, in some cases, the refugees sought sponsorship from other persons or occasionally the DIEA rejected an application for sponsorship on the grounds that the relative was not able to provide adequate support. *Ba muoi tam* obtained sponsorship from a Buddhist organization in Sydney, even though her ex-husband and a son were living in the city. The eighteen year-old niece of *Bay muoi bay* initially applied to sponsor him and his family to Sydney, but the application was rejected by the DIEA. The government arranged sponsorship through the Community Refugee Settlement Scheme (CRSS) (see Appendix 12). There was a greater incidence of refugees seeking their own sponsorship arrangements than their needed to be, due to the misinformation provided to refugees by UNHCR officials.

MIGRANT MEDICAL CLEARANCE UNIT (MMCU)

The final, and perhaps most stringent, gatekeeper for refugees resettling to Australia was the Migrant Medical Clearance Unit (MMCU)\(^{70}\) situated in Sydney. IOM medical officers in the camp examined refugees shortly after they were accepted for resettlement. The medical reports were forwarded to MMCU to examine whether the refugees met the health criteria set down for immigration (Appendix 13). Persons were rejected for resettlement on health grounds if they had a communicable disease (AIDS, hepatitis, etc.), a genetic disorder, or where the cost of future health care was deemed to be excessive.

Obtaining health clearance was generally a slow procedure. Although it was claimed that clearance only took between four and eight weeks, very few refugees received their clearance within this timespan. There were cases that had been waiting for more than five months for the results of the health examination. If health problems

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\(^{70}\) The Migrant Medical Clearance Unit was a branch of the Department of Health, Housing, Local Government and Community Services (since renamed the Department of Health and Family Services).
were detected, then the delay could stretch out for years. One of the major problems at this stage was that refugees were not kept informed of their progress. In many instances they were not told of problems with their case, the need for another medical examination, or other procedural problems.

Another problem was the expiry of medical examinations. Under the Australian Department of Health regulations, all refugees are required to have a “current” medical—which means within the previous twelve months. In some cases, delays in processing meant that the examinations became out of date. MMCU then notified the Australian Embassy in Manila that a refugee required another medical. The embassy in turn requested IOM to perform an additional examination. This was a slow and inefficient process.

**Medical Delays**

A common ailment among refugees in the camp was tuberculosis.\(^{71}\) If the disease was detected, refugees were required to undergo a treatment process for about six months—or until there was no threat of transmission. As mentioned previously, there were fifteen cases in the sample where a respondent and/or a family member were being treated for tuberculosis.

It is a damning testimony to the medical treatment provided to asylum-seekers that little effort was afforded to treat this illness in the first asylum camps. Tests for, and subsequent treatment of, the illness were only undertaken after people had obtained refugee status and were undergoing medical tests for resettlement. There was no attempt to treat the disease amongst those who had been rejected for refugee status. The examination and treatment of individuals for contagious diseases in the first asylum camps would have improved the health of the general population in the camps, and

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\(^{71}\) The incidence of tuberculosis in Vietnam is amongst the highest in world, and many refugees unknowingly brought the disease with them when they fled the country. The crowded living conditions in the first asylum camps meant that the disease was easily transmitted.
subsequently curtailed the time many people spent at the RRTC. However, financial concerns again over-rove consideration for the individual.

**Rejection on Medical Grounds**

There were some very unfortunate cases where people in the camp had been rejected for resettlement due to health problems, and it is important to mention some of these to illustrate the poor performance of the Australian resettlement scheme. One of the most deplorable cases involved the wife of Bay muoi ba who was diagnosed with ovarian cancer. MMCU quite surprisingly recommended that she have a hysterectomy in the Philippines before they would permit her entry into Australia. This astonishing decision brought considerable stress to the wife, her husband and four children for many months. MMCU did not explain how this refugee woman would pay for the medical treatment in a country with sub-standard medical facilities. It is quite abhorrent that a humanitarian program involving refugees should adopt such hard-lined economic policies.72 Fortunately, a change in government policy concerning health costs allowed the family to resettle without the woman having the operation.73

A second case involved the son of Hai tram tam, who was diagnosed with Down’s Syndrome. The husband and daughter of Hai tram tam fled Vietnam to Hong Kong, where he was accepted for refugee status and for resettlement to Australia. He wanted to stay in Hong Kong until his wife and son fled Vietnam, but was advised to resettle and reassured that his family would join him later. When Hai tram tam did escape, she was granted refugee status, and later transferred to the RRTC. Her application for resettlement to Australia was rejected because of her son’s medical

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72 A similar case, involving the wife of an Australian citizen, hit the headlines in 1994. An Australian man had married an Indonesian women, and they had three children. They had been living and working in Papua New Guinea for a number of years, but decided to leave there and move to Australia. However, the woman was refused a visa on health grounds, because she was diagnosed with breast cancer.

73 In late 1994, the Australian government changed its refugee health policy, enabling refugees with minor health problems to resettle. The new policy introduced a “ceiling” of the potential economic cost that a refugee with a disability would incur on the Australian health system. Refugees are assessed on their need for medical, pharmaceutical and community services. Persons under this “ceiling”— AUD$16,000—are permitted to resettle, while those who would incur greater costs are considered not to meet the health requirements and are rejected. (See Appendix 13).
condition. The decision has brought extreme stress to all family members living thousands of miles apart. Despite appeals to the Ministers of Health and Immigration there had been no resolution of this case in mid-1997. It is another example of the economic rationale used in Australia’s refugee resettlement program.

It is extremely difficult for refugees with serious health problems to gain resettlement. There were three individuals in the camp with extremely debilitating handicaps. Only one case, which involved a severely handicapped boy, had managed to secure resettlement—to Canada. The Australian government continued to discriminate against the disabled and physically deformed.

There were a number of other refugees with other disabilities—such as epilepsy, encephalitis, heart disorders and spinal distortion—who were rejected by Australia because of their health. Fortunately, some of them managed to resettle to Australia after the change in policy in late 1994. The ironic aspect is that some of the refugees rejected were among the better prospects for resettlement, with excellent English language skills, high work ethics and a friendly outlook on life.

**EXPECTATIONS OF RESETTLEMENT**

It was difficult to gauge the actual extent of respondents’ knowledge of Australia prior to their arrival. However, it was evident that there was considerable variation in their expectations of life in their future home. Some had a reasonably good knowledge about living and working conditions while others knew relatively little.

The best-informed refugees were usually those who regularly corresponded with family and friends who had previously resettled to Australia. For example, Mot muoi bay received considerable information about Australia in letters from his sister. In her letters she wrote that life in Australia was “good and very comfortable for those who have just arrived”. Similarly, Mot muoi chin’s son wrote that there were “lots of opportunities in Australia, such as going to school and doing anything within the law”.

In contrast, other refugees gained some scant knowledge about Australia through magazines and newspapers. For example, Mot muoi sau and Ba muoi sau both learnt
about Australia through magazines and felt that life would be comfortable for them in Australia, providing opportunities to go to school or look for jobs. Through magazines and newspapers, *Chin muoi bon* had concluded that “all facilities in Australia were better than in Vietnam”. The radio provided some information about Australia for *Bon muoi hai*, who claimed that he had learnt that the Australian people and government all help Vietnamese arrivals.

In the camp, a valuable source of information on Australia was the CO classes. *Bon muoi ba* stated she learnt from CO classes that Australians treat Vietnamese boat people as equals and they always help those who have some problems. *Sau muoi ba* learnt that “life in Australia is very good for Vietnamese”.

*Hai muoi tam* was more realistic in that he expected “life in Australia would be very difficult for the first two to three years”. Despite these probable difficulties, he claimed that life in Australia would still be better than in Vietnam or in the camp. Similarly, *Bay muoi tam* thought it would initially be difficult living in Australia because “I am inexperienced”. However, he was optimistic that his situation would improve later. *Ba muoi tam*—a divorced woman with two teenage children—was worried about her future in Australia. She commented that she worried about her life in Australia, and did not know how she would live there. *Bay muoi bon* recognised that the most difficult aspect about living in Australia was the difference between the Vietnamese and Australian cultures.

Other refugees, such as *Bon muoi nam*, found it difficult to talk about his expectations of Australia “because I have not been there”. *Bay muoi* commented that he did not know what it would be like to live in Australia because he did not know about the country.

Many refugees remarked that they were looking forward to living in Australia, where there was no discrimination. Only *Mot tram bon* was aware that discrimination existed in Australia. He claimed that “it was just like wind blowing across your face, you cannot see it, but you can feel it.”
Respondents were asked what they would do during their first year in Australia. The overwhelming response (92 persons) was to first learn English and second, to find a job. Only nine claimed that they would look for a job, and not continue ESL classes. There was probably an unrealistic expectation among some respondents that it would be easy for them to find employment in their new country. Few refugees had adequate language ability or suitable skills to find employment. For example, Bay muoi bay—a forty year old former construction worker—thought that it would be easy for him to find a job. Bay muoi chin, was hopeful that “with my talents, it will not be difficult in Australia”. Only Mot tram bay mentioned the high unemployment rate (10%) in Australia, but he argued that this was not high when compared to Vietnam.

The preferred destinations for most respondents were Sydney and Melbourne, which have been the two major destinations for Vietnamese refugee arrivals in Australia. Almost three-quarters of respondents hoped to live in either Sydney (36.1%) or Melbourne (36.1%), and less than sixteen per cent (15.7% or 17 persons) in other Australian cities (Figure 7.8). Twelve per cent of respondents (13 persons) did not state a desired location, primarily because the Australian government was organising their sponsorship.

Almost half of all respondents stated they were resettling to a particular city because they had family/relatives (40.0% or 44 persons) or friends (8.3%) living there (Figure 7.9). In addition, more than a third (34.3%) were resettling to a city because that was where their sponsor lived. The large Vietnamese or Chinese communities in Sydney and Melbourne were the attraction for four cases. Fifteen respondents gave no reason for going to a particular city, mostly because the government was arranging sponsorship.

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74 At the 1996 Census, 39.3% of Vietnamese-born persons lived in Sydney and 36.2% in Melbourne (McMurray, 1999:8).
Figure 7.8
Preferred City of Resettlement in Australia

Source: Field study, 1994
NOTICE OF DEPARTURE

The happiest moment for refugees during their detention in the refugee camp was invariably the day they received advice of their imminent departure. Whenever departure lists were displayed on notice boards there was a rush of refugees to see whether their name appeared on the list, which brought either great excitement or disappointment. For those refugees whose name appeared on the list, this was a time of great joy, as their dreams were finally coming to fruition. For others, there was disappointment that their name had failed to appear on the departure list, again. Later in the year, when the lists were no longer displayed on the noticeboard, the notification reverted to a more private advice of departure—a small piece of paper, containing an individual’s details of departure, was hand-delivered by a Neighbourhood Council.

75 For the first six months of 1994, the departure lists were brought to the camp by CO volunteers and posted on a notice board outside the International Social Service (ISS) office. The lists contained the date of departure, refugee number, name of FRA, number of persons in case, and the airline code of the city of destination.
A refugee generally received between one and two weeks notification of departure, although there were occasionally cases either side of these limits. The final week in the camp was a busy period for refugees as they finalised their departure arrangements. Refugees had to receive inoculations at the IOM clinic, have their work-credit requirements verified, and return goods to the PRPC warehouse. Most importantly, they had to say good-bye.

Most refugees held a farewell party to say good-bye to their friends. Some families sold some of their belongings so that they could purchase goods, such as food and cigarettes, for their party. The nature of the party generally varied according to the demographics of the refugee leaving. Young males would often have a more raucous party. For example, Ban tram bon held a party in the upstairs loft of his billet with a group of his young male friends. The group sat around in a large circle and a single glass of beer was passed from person to person to drink (it was regularly refilled). Some of the refugees sang and played guitars to entertain the group. Later in the day some female friends brought up plates of food that they had prepared in the kitchen below. The parties for family groups tended to be more tranquil affairs. The guests would generally gather in the upstairs loft, or occasionally outside, to talk and eat. Refugee hosts would go to considerable efforts to prepare copious amounts of food for their guests.

An imminent departure would often see refugees distributing many of their possessions to their friends. Old clothes, cooking utensils, books, etc. were passed on to friends for them to use. The departing refugees would try to restrict their baggage to one suitcase, and often less.

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76 The advice slip was often a section of the departure list containing the details for one case.
DEPARTURE DAY

Departure day was a time of great excitement and anticipation. Most departures to Australia occurred on Mondays. Departing refugees waited to be picked-up and be driven to the departure building at the far end of the PRPC complex. Some anxious refugees took their suitcases to the neighbourhood food distribution centres, and then returned to their billets to wait for the PRPC bus. The bus driver would announce his arrival in the neighbourhood in true Filipino fashion, by frantically sounding his horn. This would create a sudden flurry of activity as refugees appeared from their billets with more suitcases and carry bags and rushed to the bus. Some even carried mats, pots and pans—that should have been returned to the warehouse earlier—in the hope that the bus would stop at the warehouse on the way to the departure building. Although the bus was only supposed to carry those refugees who were departing, some other refugees also climbed aboard for a ride to the departure building. Most of the refugees also carried food and drink to consume at the departure building while they were being processed. As the departing refugees boarded the bus their names were checked off a list by one of the Vietnamese volunteers. The bus then moved down to the other neighbourhood, where the process was repeated. Sometimes the bus stopped at the warehouse to allow some refugees to return their household goods and have their forms signed, which was necessary for clearance. The number of refugees leaving from the RRTC at any one time was generally quite small—between thirty to fifty people—compared to the Orderly Departure Program departures from the PRPC which often numbered between 100 and 150 people. A total of 640 refugees resettled to Australia during the field work period at the RRTC, listed on thirty-two pro-flights during the year (average 20 persons per pro-flight).77

The departing refugees disembarked at the departure hall in Phase I with their luggage and moved into the waiting area adjoining the hall. Many of their friends also

77 The departures occurred between 17 January and 17 October 1994. The departures ranged in numbers from one to sixty-three persons. The flight manifest for each departure group was known as a "pro-flight".
travelled to the hall by tricycle to farewell their camp-mates. Mats were laid down in the waiting area for people to sit on. Groups of friends soon congregated and began consuming the food and drinks they brought with them.

Inside the departure building, Vietnamese volunteers from the PROCOSS office were setting up for processing. At the front entrance, three volunteers sat at a table going through the departure list that was compiled by IOM from information received from the various embassies. When the volunteers were ready, they called each PRA to the desk, in the order shown on the departure lists. Each PRA presented their RRTC refugee card, IOM card, billeting slip, work-credit certificate and the RRTC warehouse clearance form. At this time any electrical appliances confiscated from the refugee on arrival were returned. When all the forms were presented, the PRA’s name was crossed off the departure list, and he/she was issued with a small piece of cardboard that had a number in large lettering, together with the PRA’s name, pro-flight number, and the number of persons in that case.

The refugee returned to the adjacent waiting area after they had been processed. They sat on plastic-woven mats and ate and drank with their friends. This is a time of considerable joviality, and some of the men even enjoyed a glass of beer.

When all the departing refugees were processed, the volunteers telephoned the IOM nurse and informed her that the refugees were ready for their medical examinations. She then travelled up to the departure building from her office in the administration area. When she arrived the refugees were called into the departure building, and their details were again checked off on the departure list by IOM officials. The refugees were then sent into two small rooms at the back of the building—males on one side, females on the other—where they undressed and were given a brief medical check by the IOM nurse. The fleeting examination mainly checked that refugees had no

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78 The work-credit certificate was a signed certificate that acknowledged that the refugee had fulfilled the work requirements in the camp. The RRTC warehouse clearance form was a receipt that all goods issued to the refugee had been returned to the warehouse.

79 The number indicated the PRA’s position on the pro-flight list.
rashes on their bodies. After all persons were examined, the nurse left and the refugees waited for the bus(es) to arrive.  

The refugees were checked-off the departure list a final time by a volunteer as they boarded the bus. There was a combination of emotions showing on refugees’ faces as they looked out of the bus windows to their friends. This was a time of both joy and sorrow: happy to be leaving, but sad to leave close friends behind. It was quite symbolic that the refugees should leave the camp aboard the red Victory buses, as it represented their victory in obtaining refugee status and resettlement to a third country.

The euphoria of departure was occasionally short-lived. There were some examples where families departed, only to arrive back a few days later because of an administrative problem. For example, *Ba tram ba* left camp in early April with his wife and young daughter, but was back in camp at the end of the week after the Australian embassy had problems contacting his sponsors in Melbourne.

In other cases the departure was curtailed before the refugees even left the camp. *Ba muoi hai* was interviewed three days before he and wife and two children were due to leave camp. When the researcher was writing up the interview at lunch-time he noticed that the respondent had claimed four persons in his case, but there were only three persons on the departure list: the family’s nine day old son had not been included on the list. The researcher approached the family and told them of the possible problem, and asked whether they would like the situation to be checked with the Australian Embassy, or whether they would like to “take their chances”. A telephone call to Manila revealed that the family’s departure had been delayed. Further investigations at the RRTC revealed that IOM had found out about the problem that day, but failed to inform the family of the problem and their subsequent delay.

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80 The buses were generally organised to arrive at a certain time, unless there was an arrival that day, when the same bus was used back to Manila.

81 The interview was conducted on Friday morning and *Ba muoi hai* was due to leave camp on Monday morning.

82 It was discovered that DfE officials compiled the departure list before the baby was born. It was doubtful whether they even knew that the woman was pregnant. They only received the new medical documents on the day the refugee was interviewed by the researcher.
The Australian Embassy and/or the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs also made some mistakes with the resettlement of refugees. For example, Bay was supposed to resettle to Melbourne, where his wife and step-daughter had resettled some months earlier. However, he was horrified to find that he was being sent to Perth instead of Melbourne.83

An even more heart-wrenching mistake occurred to the family of Mot muoi tam. The husband and three children in the case left for Australia while the wife (and children’s mother) did not depart. The woman was extremely distressed that she had been separated from her four month old daughter who was still being breast-fed. Enquiries by the researcher on the woman’s behalf revealed that the embassy had made a mistake. The embassy officials had decided not to delay the resettlement of the husband and children, and thought it was easier for four people to go and one to remain than to cancel the whole family. It is questionable whether this was the right decision, as the woman had become extremely upset by the departure of her family. Fortunately, the woman left the following week.

PHILIPPINES REFUGEE TRANSIT CENTER (PRTC)

Australia-bound refugees had an overnight stop at the PRTC, following their bus journey to Manila. The next morning, all PRAs were escorted by IOM to the Australian Embassy to collect their visas and other travel documents for their family’s entry into Australia. The remainder of the day was spent waiting in the PRTC. In the late afternoon the refugees boarded a bus for their last journey before freedom. IOM drove

83 Bay decided not to question the matter with Immigration officials from the Australian Embassy in case it delayed his resettlement to Australia further. Instead, he opted to fly to Perth, then see what evolved. Upon arrival in Perth, he notified the Immigration officials that he should have gone to Melbourne. The officials advised him to first see whether there was any sponsor waiting for him. If there was not, then they might be able to send him to Melbourne. However, there were sponsors waiting for him in Perth. He stayed with them a couple of days while he arranged a ticket to Melbourne. He paid for the additional flight himself, from money he borrowed from his sponsors.
the refugees to Ninoy Aquino International Airport, where they boarded a QANTAS jet for Australia.

**SUMMARY**

The long saga of flight, asylum and transit finally came to an end when the Vietnamese refugees boarded their flight to Australia. The seventy-two respondents who resettled to Australia during the field study averaged 1811 days (or 4.96 years) between leaving Vietnam and leaving for Australia. This detention period ranged from a “mere” 1,052 days for Bay muoi tam to a massive 3,235 days for Nam muoi bon.

The PRPC/RRTC complex was considered by some staff to be the “Hilton Hotel” of refugee camps in the region. Despite this label, refugees still had to endure considerable physical hardships during their stay. As was noted above, one of the greatest hardships was the meagre food ration provided to refugees, which was just the minimum required to survive. Many refugees relied on money remitted from overseas to provide them with additional food to make life in the camp more comfortable. On the positive side, the camp provided good accommodation and access to health and education facilities.

This study has also revealed that refugees suffered significant mental pressures caused by the delays in obtaining resettlement. For many refugees, it proved far more difficult to obtain resettlement than they had earlier imagined as they were rejected by one country after another. Many refugees also encountered obstacles that delayed their resettlement after being accepted by a resettlement country. This research has identified numerous problems in the operations of organizations working in the camp, as well as in the Australian Embassy in Manila, and the Medical Migrant Clearance Unit in Sydney that all caused delays in the resettlement of many refugees to Australia. The gatekeepers refused to listen to the enquiries or complaints from refugees, and the faulty procedures became entrenched. It was shown that the Australian government viewed refugees with health problems on the basis of financial cost rather than any humanitarian concern.
The Australian government’s commitment to providing pre-departure orientation to refugees was pitiful. Notwithstanding the efforts of voluntary CO teachers, the Australian orientation program was a poor effort to provide information to the soon-to-be migrants. The Australian government missed an ideal opportunity to provide extensive education, training and orientation to refugees during their internment at the RRTC. The American ODP program showed that extensive in-camp education and orientation delivery was a feasible means of providing services to refugees rather than relying on post-arrival services.

The departure of refugees from the Philippines not only signalled the end to the transit stage in the refugee experience but also the beginning of a new stage—refugee resettlement—which is examined in Chapter 8.
ARRIVAL IN PARADISE:
THE INITIAL SETTLEMENT OF VIETNAMESE REFUGEES IN AUSTRALIA

Thank you Australia,
The generous country that saves my family.
Thank you Australia,
The lucky country which gives the hand
To all immigrants.
Thank you Australia,
The blessed earth which gives the heart
To the people who are in need.
Through the long years
I sought happiness, I felt hopeless, I found tears.

Now in this hemisphere,
Under the Southern Cross
I find the paradise, I enjoy with my life.
How wonderful new era!
    Thank you, Australia

Hoang Hoi (1994:94)

INTRODUCTION TO RESETTLEMENT

Of the three durable solutions to mass refugee outflows, resettlement is considered the solution of last resort—"reserved only for compelling humanitarian reasons" (U.S. Office of the Coordinator for Refugee Affairs cited in Stein, 1986a:278). However, the rapid growth in refugee numbers in recent decades, has seen many asylum countries unwilling to provide permanent settlement, being particularly concerned that
they will be left with long-term refugee populations. Concurrently, many refugees have not been willing to consider repatriation to their homeland as a feasible option in their foreseeable future. This has left resettlement, particularly to one of the developed countries, as the most feasible option. Resettlement to one of the major refugee-receiving countries was unquestionably the coveted solution for most of those people who fled Vietnam.¹

Resettlement is far more than just the arrival of an immigrant in a new country. It is a complex process that involves variables at the societal, institutional, family and individual levels (Nann, 1982:2). This complexity has been captured by numerous researchers, including Beiser (1991), Cox (1977), Hitch (1983), Sluzki (1979) and Tyhurst (1951) who all contend that refugees follow a series of predictable phases in resettlement—an initial period of euphoria upon resettlement, followed by a period of disillusionment or even depression, before recovering.² Each of these resettlement phases is a stressful period, which requires considerable adaptive and coping responses on the part of the refugee. There is no time limit on the transition from one phase to the next, which depends on a variety of individual physical and psychological factors, as

¹ More than 250,000 Chinese-Vietnamese (Viel hoa) who fled Vietnam into China did in fact settle in that country. However, some of these refugees later fled to other countries in the region in order to gain refugee status in Western countries, due to their dissatisfaction with living in China. In addition, small numbers of Vietnamese were also able to settle in some of the other first asylum nations in the region (See Chapter 3).

² The “stages of distress” model presented by Beiser (1991:426) had a period of initial euphoria that lasted between two and six months, followed by a disillusionment phase that lasted between six months and two years. Cox (1977) developed a more elaborate process involving four phases: the honeymoon phase, the disenchantment phase, a beginning resolution phase and an effective functioning phase. A similar four phase process proposed by Hitch (1983:43) commenced with a honeymoon period, characterised by “the feeling of relief, well being, hyper (or heightened) task activity, denial of alien aspects of new surroundings”. This was followed by a period of “decomposition or crisis”, when the future and the present are rejected, and there is harping on the past. During this phase there is evidence of “suspicion and paranoia fairly universal through mostly mild-anxiety, depression, plenty of dreams, a frequent combination of hostility and helplessness. In some cases a dawning realisation of the inevitability of low social mobility” (Hitch, 1983:43). A later phase is when parents, if not looking back, may consider themselves the upholders of culture, which may lead to family conflicts with their children. The fourth phase is during old age, when there is increasing nostalgia, and if there is no support, increasing insecurity and loneliness (Hitch, 1983:43).
well as employment, the degree of services and other support provided to the refugee (Baker, 1983:7).³

The initial phase of resettlement has been identified by Waxman (1998:761) as “a critical period in the life of all newly resettled refugees” because it has a long-term impact on the refugees. Lewins and Ly’s (1985:29) research on Vietnamese settlement in Australia found that the post-arrival period was the “most significant stage of their settlement” as it was during this period that they suffered the “greatest difficulties of adjustment … and the foundations of many permanent attitudes were laid”. Beiser (1991:431) believed that “what happens to people after they enter a country of permanent asylum probably has a greater effect on their mental health during the first years of resettlement than what happened to them before”. He found that separation from family, unemployment and underemployment were the most powerful and salient post-migration stresses. Research on Indochinese refugees in Melbourne conducted by the Victorian Ethnic Affairs Commission (VEAC) (1983b:56–57) found that resettlement difficulties were greatest amongst those who had been in Australia less than one year, and declined as the period of residence increased. They found that virtually every issue presented some problem during the first twelve months, although difficulties with language, housing and finance, along with the three problems identified by Beiser, were the major causes of stress (Victorian Ethnic Affairs Commission, 1983b:56–57). Taylor and Nathan (cited in Stein 1981:328) argued that the need for guidance is greatest in the initial stages of resettlement, because without clear guidance from the host, the refugee does not know what to do. They argued that the refugee

³ Baker (1983:7) claimed that refugee resettlement is influenced by “the individual’s physical and psychological health, whether the person comes from an urban or rural environment, the level of intelligence of the refugee, the degree of ambivalence and/or hostility which is experienced in settling into a new area and home, whether work is available, whether the area of resettlement is one of social deprivation, whether people from their own culture (refugee or not) already live in the area and provide a mutual self-help support group, and whether the person is a ‘traditional’ or ‘new’ refugee”.
is experiencing crisis and is often placed in ambiguous situations without clear definitions of behavioural expectations ... tries to redefine his/her life situation and to adopt strategies for dealing with the crisis; he/she begins to discover that their prior life experiences have not adequately prepared him for a life in this different culture. (Taylor and Nathan cited in Stein 1981:328)

A secondary research aim of this project was to investigate some of the early resettlement experiences of the original respondents. Approximately seventy per cent of the original respondents (76 persons) had resettled to Australia by the completion of field work in the Philippines. By the time of commencement of secondary field work in March 1995, all these respondents had been in Australia for less than twelve months. Information on the early resettlement experiences was obtained through informal discussions with refugees and personnel from refugee and community organizations.

**CHANGING RESETTLEMENT EXPERIENCES**

The resettlement experiences of Vietnamese refugees in Australia have changed considerably over the years. The first Vietnamese refugees, unlike many earlier European refugee arrivals, landed in a country with no existing community to provide support, which has been found to be associated with greater levels of maladaptation and mental illness (Kraus; Murphy cited in Bowman and Edwards, 1984:45; Nann, 1982:3). They arrived in a country with a "dominant culture", and where there were enormous cultural differences between themselves and the host population (Hitch, 1983:48; Stein, 1981:330). Baker (1983:8) claimed that the greater the difference between host culture and refugee culture, the longer it will take for refugees to resettle. He added that the

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4 Field work in Australia was conducted between March and June 1995.
5 No formal questionnaire was devised for this stage of the research, but the interviewer directed discussion around a set of broad headings, such as employment, housing, education, family, resettlement experiences, etc. In fourteen cases there was more than one meeting with the refugee, while in two cases there was only one meeting.
6 Tran (1995) estimated that the Vietnamese population in Australia in early 1975 was about 300—mostly students. However, a more detailed analysis of the 1976 Census by Coughlan (1989b:1) estimated that the number of Vietnamese in Australia prior to April 1975 was 940.
cultural differences have been far greater for “new” refugees (such as the Vietnamese) than those experienced by “old” or “traditional” refugees from Europe.

To further exacerbate the problems of settlement, the first arrivals from Vietnam were not a homogeneous group, but varied widely in ethnicity, class, rural/urban origins, occupations, education levels, etc. The trauma of flight, the separation of families, and uncertainty of material welfare led to “widespread personal and family insecurity,” which was often accompanied by a “fear of government and cultural alienation” (Viviani, 1991:123). For most of the first refugees, it was a “trip to the unknown” (Tran and Nelson, 1982:12). They arrived in Australia with little notion of what the country was like and were “totally unprepared for the inevitable changes in lifestyle” (Lewins and Ly, 1985:29).

The Australian federal government was not prepared for the unexpected arrival of refugees, so initially there were few resources available to assist and a good deal of improvisation was required by officials and agencies to provide services. Even when services were available, the majority of refugees spoke little or no English, and there was a lack of translator services, so that settlement services were not fully utilised. Personel who had to deal with the new arrivals were inexperienced with dealing with Vietnamese and their problems (Viviani, 1984:182). It is not surprising that communication problems were the cause of many early resettlement problems (MSJ Keys Young, 1980:119).

The arrival of Vietnamese refugees was also the “first substantial test of the actual disestablishment” of the White Australia policy (Viviani, 1988:176). The arrival of large numbers of boat people was not universally accepted, and there was “local opposition, particularly in Darwin, and sensational headlines warning of floods of refugees” (Viviani, 1988:176).

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7 An early survey discovered that 383 (88.7%) out of 537 Vietnamese refugees spoke little or no English and only nine (2.0%) had a “useful working knowledge” (Lewins and Ly, 1985:29).
In contrast, the more recent Vietnamese refugee arrivals to Australia have arrived in a country far better equipped to handle such influxes. A national inquiry into migrant settlement services in 1978 changed the way many services were provided, with responsibility for settlement services moved from the Department of Immigration to ethnic associations and other government departments, enabling the delivery of services to clients in their own languages. The Community Refugee Settlement Scheme (CRSS) was introduced, enabling community-based organizations to sponsor refugees into the country. In addition, Migrant Resource Centres were established in major cities to provide information to refugees and other migrants. The government also introduced other measures, including the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP), telephone interpreting, and research on migrant settlement (Viviani, 1996:32). By the 1990s, Vietnamese refugees were arriving in a country that had a sizeable Vietnam-born population (Table 8.1). In addition, Australia’s Vietnamese community has grown into a large and dynamic group that actively takes an interest in refugee matters, with family and friends both major sources of refugee sponsorship.

It is debatable whether the recent Vietnamese refugee arrivals have been better prepared for life in Australia than the first arrivals. Many recent refugees had connections with family and/or friends who had previously resettled and gained insights into Australian life from regular correspondence. Furthermore, the extensive period of confinement in the refugee camps of South East Asia provided some with the opportunity to learn English and to undertake cultural orientation classes to learn about conditions in Australia. However, Fordham (1991:3) claimed that there was a lack of preparedness and established goals in the camps, which created a major setback to resettlement. He argued that

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8 In 1978, prominent barrister Frank Galbally QC conducted an inquiry into migrant settlement services.

9 The Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA) fact sheet on the Adult Migrant English Program is included in Appendix 14.
they failed to recognise the negative aspects of living in a new country—loss of language, vast cultural differences, loss of vocational status (no or little recognition of professional qualifications), lack of understanding of one’s motivation for leaving by the host community to say nothing of climate, environmental differences and alien civil code. (Fordham, 1991:3)

Consequently, although many of the recent Vietnamese refugees may have had more idea of where they were going, they did not necessarily understand the difficulties involved in resettling to a new country.

Table 8.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Vietnam-born population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>2,427</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>41,096</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>83,028</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>121,813</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>150,941</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998*</td>
<td>169,645</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Non-census estimate

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1997; Bureau of Immigration and Population Research, 1994:3; McMurray, 1999:3; Mellor, 1999:11

Resettlement experiences vary significantly from one refugee to another, even among a similar cohort of refugees. The settlement experiences of most Vietnamese arriving at any one instance differ because their “personal, family and social attributes vary considerably”, even though they encounter roughly the same conditions in beginning settlement (Viviani, 1984:173). The process and rate of acculturation can vary even among members of the same family, as different adaptive patterns emerge. It has been found that factors such as age, gender, marital status, educational and vocational background, life experiences in Vietnam, type of sponsorship (family or community-based), existing social network in Australia, contact with wider community,
city of settlement, and host language ability can all influence the settlement experience (Nann, 1982:4; Vuong and Mai, 1995).

THE VIETNAMESE IN AUSTRALIA

To gain a better understanding of the settlement of Vietnamese refugees in Australia, it would be beneficial to first examine the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of this refugee population. Unfortunately there are no national statistics available for Vietnamese refugees in Australia, so that Australian Census statistics on the Vietnam-born population must be used as a proxy instead, together with other secondary sources.

A total of 94,622 Vietnamese refugees arrived in Australia between April 1975 and June 1998, and a further 15,841 Vietnam-born arrived in other humanitarian programs, out of a total of 168,015 Vietnam-born settler arrivals (Table 8.2; Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, 1999a). The proportion of Vietnam-born persons arriving as refugees began declining in the mid-1980s as Family Reunion and Orderly Departure Program categories of settler arrivals began increasing (McNamara, 1997:62).

The increase in the Vietnam-born population in Australia between 1991 and 1996 (23.9%) was less than for the previous inter-censal period (47.2%). While McMurray (1999, 9) correctly claimed that this reflects changing economic and social

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10 McNamara (1997:62–64) stated that 81.1% of Vietnam-born settlers to Australia in 1983–84 entered through the refugee/special humanitarian scheme. By 1994–95, just under one-third (29.6%) entered under this scheme, while almost two-thirds (66.3%) entered under the family reunion scheme. The number of Vietnam-born entering Australia through the refugee/special humanitarian scheme is now only a handful each year (see Table 8.2).

11 The increase in the Vietnam-born population was also greater in absolute numbers between 1986 and 1991 (38,785 persons) than during 1991 and 1996 (29,128 persons) (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1997; Bureau of Immigration and Population Research, 1994:3; McMurray, 1999:3).
Table 8.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Financial year</th>
<th>Refugee Arrivals</th>
<th>Special Humanitarian Program(^a) Arrivals</th>
<th>Special Assistance Category(^b) Arrivals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1974–75(^c)</td>
<td>676</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975–76</td>
<td>512</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976–77</td>
<td>878</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977–78</td>
<td>5,421</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978–79</td>
<td>10,752</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979–80</td>
<td>12,953</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980–81</td>
<td>12,201</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981–82</td>
<td>11,004</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982–83(^d)</td>
<td>8,177</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983–84(^d)</td>
<td>7,908</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984–85(^d)</td>
<td>5,808</td>
<td>41</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985–86(^d)</td>
<td>4,307</td>
<td>335</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986–87(^d)</td>
<td>2,831</td>
<td>1,112</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987–88(^d)</td>
<td>2,440</td>
<td>1,420</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988–89</td>
<td>1,269</td>
<td>2,594</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989–90</td>
<td>267</td>
<td>5,412</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990–91</td>
<td>454</td>
<td>2,682</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991–92</td>
<td>1,044</td>
<td>517</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992–93</td>
<td>1,751</td>
<td>151</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993–94</td>
<td>2,253</td>
<td>44</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994–95</td>
<td>1,447</td>
<td>52</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995–96</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>41</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996–97</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1,011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997–98</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>384</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>94,622</td>
<td>14,436</td>
<td>1,405</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\) SHP include the In-Country Special Humanitarian Program for those people suffering persecution within their own country, and the Global Special Humanitarian Program for people who have left their country because of significant discrimination amounting to a gross violation of human rights.

\(^b\) SAC embraces groups determined by the Minister of Immigration to be of special concern to Australia but who do not fit traditional humanitarian categories. This program also assists those internally displaced people who have close family links with Australia.

\(^c\) April 1975–June 1975

\(^d\) The number of refugee arrivals in these years vary depending on whether "Citizen of Vietnam" or "Vietnam-born" is used to classify the refugees. It was decided to use the former as this included the greater number of arrivals (877 more than the latter classification).

conditions in Vietnam, she ignored the impact that the Comprehensive Plan of Action had on the number of refugees eligible for resettlement.12

AGE AND SEX PROFILE OF THE VIETNAM-BORN POPULATION

There were 150,941 Vietnam-born persons (75,159 males and 75,782 females) living in Australia at the time of the 1996 Census (Figure 8.1). For the first time in the twenty-one year history of Vietnamese settlement in Australia, Vietnam-born females outnumbered Vietnam-born males. This was brought about by a significant increase in Vietnam-born females (30.4% or 17,661 females) during the 1991–1996 period compared to only an 18.0 per cent increase (11,467) among males. The most notable increase in absolute numbers was among females aged between 25 and 45 years, who increased by 11,156 persons. As a consequence, the sex ratio of the Vietnam-born population has declined considerably over the last decade (from 123.6 in 1986 to 99.2 in 1996). This indicates a significant change in the composition of the Vietnam-born population migrating to Australia in recent years (Bureau of Immigration and Population Research, 1994:8; McMurray, 1999:9).13

The Vietnam-born population is a relatively youthful community, with a median age of 34.9 years in 1996—an increase from 26.2 years in 1986 and 29.0 years in 1991. This median age is younger than total overseas-born Australians (44.8 years), but marginally older than the total Australian population (34.6 years) and the Australia-born

12 Figure 3.9 shows that the number of Vietnamese eligible for resettlement declined dramatically after the introduction of the CPA in 1989. Furthermore, the introduction of screening procedures was one of the main factors in reducing the flow of asylum-seekers arriving in first asylum countries after 1989.

13 The sex ratio is the number of males per 100 females. The earlier high sex ratio reflects the domination of single males escaping Vietnam in the 1970s and 1980s and the reluctance of females to leave due to the dangers of refugee flight. The high sex ratio was apparently widespread, as Rumbaut (cited in Kibria, 1993:112) reported a sex ratio of 120 in his research in San Diego. The decline in the sex ratio in Australia is the result of female dominated Family Reunion and Orderly Departure Program migrations. First, earlier arriving males sponsored wives, daughters and sisters. Second, young male Vietnamese returned to Vietnam to marry or get engaged, and their wives or fiancées subsequently migrated to Australia.
population (30.4 years) (Figure 8.2; Mellor, 1999:11). Almost three-quarters (73.9%) of Vietnamese were within the prime working ages 15-44 years (McMurray, 1999:9).

Figure 8.1

Age and Sex Distribution of the Vietnam-born Population in Australia, 1996

Source: 1996 Census-Customised Matrix Table CS072 cited in McMurray, 1999:9

Figure 8.2

Comparison of Median Age for Vietnam-born Population with Other Birthplace Groups, 1996

Source: Mellor, 1999:11
Slightly more than half (54.5%) of Vietnam-born females were married in 1991 while more than a third (35%) had never married (Figure 8.3). In comparison, half (50.0%) of the Vietnam-born males were married, and almost that many again (46.1%) had never married. Thomas (1997:279) claimed that many Vietnamese men remain unmarried throughout their lives. There was a larger percentage of widowed women (5.5%) than widowed men (0.9%), which Thomas (1997:279) claimed reflects the large number of women widowed during the war years. In addition, it may also be a consequence of Family Reunion migration and the higher life expectancy of women.

Figure 8.3


**GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF THE VIETNAM-BORN POPULATION IN AUSTRALIA**

One of the most distinctive patterns of settlement for the Vietnam-born has been that the vast majority (98.4%) have settled in urban areas of Australia, with nearly all
(97.4%) settling in the state or territory capitals. In 1996, three-quarters of the Vietnam-born population lived in either Sydney (39.3%) or Melbourne (36.2%) (Table 8.3). An increasing number of Vietnamese have gravitated to Sydney, and more recently Melbourne, after previously settling elsewhere in Australia due to better job opportunities, kinsfolk and ethnic community support systems (Burnley, 1990:149; Burnley, 1996:80; Viviani, 1996:48).

The proportion of the Vietnam-born population declined in a number of regional cities, such as Wollongong (-10.5%), Newcastle (-8.6%) and Geelong (-0.4%), as well as the Tasmanian capital of Hobart (-34.2%), during the 1991–1996 period. These declines are most likely the result of migration to state (and mainland) capitals such as Sydney and Melbourne (Bureau of Immigration and Population Research, 1994:7; McMurray, 1999:8).

The figures include Vietnamese-born living in Queanbeyan, as the data were for the Canberra-Queanbeyan district.

Burnley (1989:135) calculated that 3,144 Vietnam-born persons migrated to Sydney from other areas of Australia between 1981 and 1986—which represented 9.7% of Sydney’s Vietnam-born population in 1986 (32,536 persons). During the 1991–1996 inter-censal period, the proportion of Vietnam-born population residing in Sydney increased from 38.9% (47,352 persons) of the national population to 39.3% (59,322)—an overall increase of 11,970 persons. It is notable that the Vietnam-born population in both the other major cities in New South Wales—Wollongong and Newcastle—declined during the 1991–1996 period, by 10.5% and 8.6% respectively (Bureau of Immigration and Population Research, 1994a:7; McMurray, 1999:8).

Melbourne experienced the greatest growth rate of any capital city in the Vietnam-born population between 1986 and 1991—59.2%. The Vietnam-born population then increased from 35.9% (43,677 persons) of the national population in 1991 to 39.3% (54,559 persons) in 1996—an overall increase of 10,882 persons.

This type of migration—designated by Price (cited in Hugo, 1990:196) as “gravitation group migration and settlement”—was evident among displaced persons from eastern Europe in the post-war period. A study conducted by Wilson (1990:163) found that 14 per cent of respondents had previously lived in other capital cities and subsequently migrated to Sydney.
Table 8.3

Major Cities of Vietnamese Settlement in Australia, 1996a

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Location</th>
<th>1996 Census</th>
<th>% of Total Population in Location</th>
<th>% of COBc Population in State</th>
<th>% of COBc Population in Australia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sydney</td>
<td>59,322</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>97.1</td>
<td>39.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melbourne</td>
<td>54,559</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>98.8</td>
<td>36.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adelaide</td>
<td>10,418</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>97.9</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brisbane</td>
<td>10,328</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>94.1</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perth</td>
<td>9,611</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>95.2</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canberra-Queanbeyan</td>
<td>2,284</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wollongong</td>
<td>813</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darwin</td>
<td>391</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>72.3</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newcastle</td>
<td>233</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hobart</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>99.3</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geelong</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gold Coast-Tweed Heads</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>97.9</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other locations</td>
<td>2,394</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>150,896</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a Capital cities are “Statistical Divisions”, Gold Coast-Tweed Heads and Canberra-Queanbeyan are “Statistical Districts” and other locations are “Statistical Subdivision” as defined by the Australian Standard Geographical Classification.


Source: Adapted from 1996 Census-Customised Matrix Table CS068, cited in McMurray, 1999:8

GEOGRAPHIC CONCENTRATION OF THE VIETNAM-BORN POPULATION

Over the last fifty years it has been quite common for immigrants, especially unskilled or semi-skilled workers with little knowledge of English, to concentrate in lower socio-economic areas of Australian cities (Burnley, 1989). These initial concentrations of pioneer immigrants were later reinforced through chain migration of fellow immigrants.

It is generally considered that immigrant clustering assists the psychological adjustment and economic adaptation of new arrivals, and there is evidence of this with Vietnamese refugees in Australia (Viviani, 1980), the United Kingdom (Robinson, 1993) and the United States (Desbarats, 1985; Nguyen and Haines, 1996). Although the arrival of large numbers of refugees to a particular area may strain local resources, there
are significant benefits. Established ethnic enclaves cushion the arrival for newly arrived refugees by providing a sense of identity and belonging, thereby “assisting their absorption into the city via a particularly familiar sub-community with which they have language, cultural and often kinship links” (Hugo, 1990:196). The established ethnic community

is a particularly effective mechanism for facilitating the exchange of information and mutual help, thereby aiding the resettlement process, reducing anxiety and mental distress, and providing vital employment and business-related information. ... The disadvantaged who cannot function effectively in mainstream ... society may also find a protective, navigable environment within the enclave. (Nguyen and Haines, 1996:317)

In fact, dispersal policies previously adopted in Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States were found to have “severely inhibited the adaptation and integration of Indochinese refugees by not permitting the development of a viable ethnic community, which could help refugees adapt to their new circumstances” (Coughlan, 1992:86). Dispersed refugees were found to suffer from isolation, with often insufficient resources to meet their special needs (Duke and Marshall, 1995:35).

The high concentration of Vietnamese refugee settlement in Australia has been “[o]ne of the most striking patterns of spatial concentration of any large immigrant group” (Hugo, 1990:190). In fact, the Vietnamese are the most spatially concentrated birthplace group in Australia, with “a degree of spatial concentration unprecedented in post-war Australian cities for any significant birthplace group” (Hugo, 1990:190).18 Large ethnic Vietnamese enclaves have formed in lower socio-economic status suburbs in all states, but most notably in Cabramatta (Fairfield LGA) in Sydney, Footscray (Maribyrnong LGA) and Springvale (Greater Dandenong LGA) in Melbourne, Croydon

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18 Index of Dissimilarity values calculated for Vietnam-born people in 1981 meant that almost two-thirds would have to change their SLA of residence to have the same per cent distribution as the Australia-born. The figures decreased slightly in 1986 in Victoria, Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia, but increased in New South Wales (Hugo, 1990:190). The Index of Dissimilarity (ID) is “the percentage of an ethnic group in a metropolitan area that would have to redistribute itself to have the same spatial distribution as another ethnic group” (Burnley, 1989:135).
and the “Parks” suburbs of north-western Adelaide (Enfield LGA), and Wacol-Darra in Brisbane (Table 8.4).\(^{19}\)

Earlier analysis of Census data by Hugo (1990), Wilson (1990) and Coughlan (1992) revealed some reductions in the geographic concentrations of the Vietnam-born population as they migrated out of the initial areas of settlement to adjoining locations. However, analysis of the 1996 Census (Table 8.4) shows that many of the areas of highest Vietnam-born concentration in 1991 had actually increased their proportion of that population by 1996. For example, those Local Government Areas (LGAs) in New South Wales with the highest concentrations of Vietnamese in 1991—Fairfield, Auburn, Marrickville, Bankstown and Canterbury—all experienced increases of the Vietnam-born by 1996, in both absolute numbers and as a proportion of the total LGA population. Most notable of these was Fairfield, where the Vietnam-born population increased from 11.3 per cent of the total LGA population in 1991 (or 19,316 persons) to 13.6 per cent (24,647 persons) in 1996. Similar increases were also evident in Enfield (South Australia)—where the proportion of Vietnam-born increased by 1.1 percentage points (664 persons)—and Bayswater (Western Australia, 0.8 percentage points or 327 persons), between 1991 and 1996. Vietnamese concentration was highest in the recently created LGA of Maribyrnong (Victoria)—which incorporated the former Footscray and

\(^{19}\) The spatial concentration of Vietnamese can be explained by a number of factors. The foundations of concentration were laid by the early refugee arrivals who initially stayed in migrant hostels. When they left the hostels, which was generally after three to six months, they moved into neighbouring areas because they were familiar with the surroundings. Furthermore, there was usually public housing and/or cheap private-rental housing available in these areas. In addition, these areas were well serviced by specialised settlement services (generally because of the hostels). Many early arrivals also established shops and restaurants in the locality, to service the increasing demand for these facilities. There were often unskilled work opportunities available nearby (Hugo, 1990:195; Viviani, 1996:55–56). Existing clustering of Vietnamese relatives, friends and the refugee community in general have also proven to be a strong attraction in the settlement of refugees, especially the chain migration of family members (Wilson, 1990:170). In addition, the concentration of immigrant groups has been encouraged through the Community Refugee Settlement Scheme, which often uses sponsorship arrangements based on the existing community (Visser, 1994).
part of Sunshine LGAs—where the Vietnam-born comprised 13.7 per cent of the population (Table 8.4).\textsuperscript{20}

### Table 8.4

**Top 20 Locations of Vietnam-Born Population in Australia**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local Government Area (LGA)(^b)</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>COB(^c) as % of total population in LGA</th>
<th>Total number of COB(^c) Population in LGA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maribyrnong (C)</td>
<td>Vic</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>8,056</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairfield (C)</td>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>24,647</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater Dandenong (C)</td>
<td>Vic</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>10,286</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auburn (A)</td>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>3,792</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yarra (C)</td>
<td>Vic</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>4,745</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brimbank (C)</td>
<td>Vic</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>10,060</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enfield (C)</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>3,439</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marrickville (A)</td>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>4,293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bankstown (C)</td>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>8,562</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canterbury (C)</td>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>5,273</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vincent (T)</td>
<td>WA</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>924</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melbourne (C)</td>
<td>Vic</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>1,318</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moonee Valley (C)</td>
<td>Vic</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>2,850</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bayswater (C)</td>
<td>WA</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>1,170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liverpool (C)</td>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2,818</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindmarsh &amp; Woodville (C)</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>1,936</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salisbury (C)</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>2,326</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hobsons Bay (C)</td>
<td>Vic</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>1,596</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whittlesea (C)</td>
<td>Vic</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>1,692</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stirling (C)</td>
<td>WA</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>2,839</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\) The top 20 is ranked by the proportion of the Vietnam-born population in the total population of the LGA. LGAs containing less than 0.5% of the total Vietnam-born population in Australia are not included.  
\(^b\) LGAs are defined as the legal local government areas and incorporate local government councils such as towns and shires. The large LGAs of Brisbane and Canberra have not been broken down by suburb.  
\(^c\) COB (Country of Birth) = Persons born in Vietnam

**Explanatory Note:** The letters in brackets following the name of the LGA are defined as follows: 
(C) City (M) Municipality (S) Shire (T) Town (A) Area

**Source:** 1996 Census – Customised Matrix Table CS070 cited McMurray, 1999:8

\textsuperscript{20} It is extremely difficult to conduct comparisons of the Vietnam-born population in Victorian LGAs between the 1991 Census and the 1996 Census because of changes to LGA boundaries that came into effect on 15 December 1994. In addition, McMurray (1999) has treated Brisbane as one single LGA, and not broken the LGA into suburbs, as the Bureau of Immigration and Population Research (1994a) did with the 1991 data.
In addition to the increased residential concentration, Viviani (1996:56) also noted an increase in the dispersion of the Vietnam-born. She claimed that despite the Vietnamese having high levels of concentration, they were also moving out of these areas faster than any other migrant group. The Vietnamese, who are the second most mobile group in Australia, generally make “several housing moves in their first five years” (Viviani, 1996:56). Vietnamese out-migration is generally either spillover to adjoining suburbs; migration from inner city to outer suburban areas of concentration; or the migration to middle-class areas not connected to areas of concentration (Viviani, 1996:53). The rate of dispersion to higher-status areas is, according to Viviani (1996:53), much greater than the rate of concentration in poorer areas.

**VIETNAMESE IN THE LABOUR FORCE**

Employment has been identified by various researchers, including Stein (1979a), Goldlust and Richmond (1984), Carey-Wood, Duke, Karn and Marshall (1994) and Duke (1994), as playing an important role in the refugee resettlement process. Duke (1994:25) stated:

Employment provides refugees with the opportunity to practice language skills, interact with the community and learn more about the culture and traditions of the new country. More importantly, employment has great psychological benefits for refugees. Jobs enable refugees to become economically independent and to regain their confidence which, in many cases, has been shattered by the trauma of fleeing from their home countries. (Duke, 1995:25)

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21 An example of spillover migration is evident in the South Australian LGAs of Salisbury and Hindmarsh & Woodville, which both adjoin the highly concentrated Enfield LGA. Both LGAs increased their proportion of Vietnamese between 1991 and 1996 (Bureau of Immigration and Population Research, 1994a:7; McMurray, 1999:8).

22 Viviani (1996:53) claimed that both Burnley (1989) and Wilson (1990) had noted a general movement of Vietnamese from inner-city suburbs to outer-ring areas of concentration.

23 The increasing settlement of Vietnamese in Sydney’s north shore, Brisbane’s southern suburbs and to Doncaster, Chadstone and Templestone in Melbourne is evidence of migration to middle-class areas not connected to areas of concentration (Viviani, 1996:53).
Unfortunately, the settlement of Vietnamese refugees in Australia has been hindered by widespread unemployment, with rates persisting around thirty per cent for much of the twenty-five years of settlement. The protracted high rates were partly due to the continuous arrival of largely unskilled persons (in terms of the needs of the Australian labour market) who did not speak English (Viviani, 1996:57). In addition, their arrival has coincided with two of the worst economic recessions since the 1930s, and during an era in which the manufacturing industry has undergone considerable structural change. These events severely impacted on the Vietnamese (Viviani, 1996:58). In addition, the traditional areas of Vietnam-born settlement have been areas of very high unemployment—severely affected by the restructuring of manufacturing industry—which is reflected in high rates of unemployment among the Australian-born population in those areas (Department of Housing and Regional Development, 1995).

However, the labour force status of the Vietnam-born has undergone considerable changes during the 1991–1996 inter-censal period. The 1996 Census revealed a 46.4 per cent increase in the number of Vietnam-born who were employed and a 25 per cent fall in the number who were unemployed (Table 8.5). The unemployment rate for the Vietnam-born fell from 39.8 per cent in 1991 to 25.2 per cent in 1996—still three times that of the total Australian population. The overall participation of Vietnamese in the labour force has continued to decline steadily: from a participation rate of 71.0 per cent in 1986, to 65.6 per cent in 1991 and 58.6 per cent in 1996 (McMurray, 1995).

Unemployment rates among the Vietnam-born vary across

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25 Structural change is defined by Dwyer, Wilson and Woock (cited in Coughlan, 1991b:48) as “a process of significant change in the patterns of organization of resources, including capital and labour, and the economy’s link with the rest of the world”. Forrest (cited in Viviani, 1996:66) reported that the manufacturing industry—traditionally a major employer of immigrants—lost nearly half its jobs between 1971 and 1991.

26 McMurray (1999:18) has attributed, in part, the decline in labour force participation rate as being a consequence of the predominance of family reunion migration in recent years. In addition, it would also be partly a reflection of the ageing of the Vietnam-born population. The 65+ population increased from 3.2% of the Vietnam-born population in 1991 to 4.9% in 1996 (McMurray, 1999:5).
the nation, with South Australia (27.3%), Victoria (27.2%) and New South Wales (25.3%) all exceeding the national Vietnam-born average (25.2%) (Figure 8.4).

Table 8.5

(Persons aged 15 years and over)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Per cent</td>
<td>Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>41,852</td>
<td>39.5</td>
<td>61,289</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>27,626</td>
<td>26.1</td>
<td>20,644</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not in Labour Force</td>
<td>34,812</td>
<td>32.9</td>
<td>57,831</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>105,853</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>142,483</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: McMurray, 1999:5

Earlier research on the Vietnamese in Australia conducted by Viviani (1996:58) and Coughlan (1991a, 1991b) found that the persistently high levels of unemployment were associated with age structure, gender, low levels of education and English competence, and overall period of residence in Australia. It is interesting to note that the Lebanese—another predominately refugee group who arrived over the same period—have also experienced high unemployment rates (Birrell, 1993; Khoo, 1994; Lampugnani, 1994; McAllister, 1991; Strombach, Chapman, Dawkins and Bushe-Jones, 1992).

Viviani (1996:71) previously reported that Vietnamese youth (aged 15–24 years) and those over fifty years had the highest rates of unemployment: at sixty and nearly eighty per cent respectively. However, the youth unemployment rate had fallen to 33.3

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27 The line graphs of male and female unemployment rates presented by Viviani (1996:176) show that not all the 15–24 year age group or 50+ age group recorded such high unemployment rates. For example, males aged 15–19 years recorded 60 per cent unemployment. For males 20–24 years and females 15–19 and 20–24 years the rate was approximately 55 per cent. Furthermore, 80 per cent
per cent by 1996 and the unemployment rate for persons aged over forty-five years was 30.4 per cent (McMurray, 1999:19).

**Figure 8.4**

**Unemployment Rates of the Vietnam-born, by State, 1996**

![Unemployment Rates of the Vietnam-born, by State, 1996](image)

**State/territory**

Source: Adapted from 1996 Census Customised Matrix Table CS084 cited McMurray, 1999

In 1996, unemployment remained higher among Vietnam-born women (29.1%) than men (22.3%). Both Thomas (1997:287) and Viviani (1996:57) had previously noted high localised unemployment rates for females, which had exceeded sixty per cent in areas such as Footscray and Collingwood in 1991. As may be expected, unemployment rates are higher for those who have lower levels of education and English proficiency (Coughlan, 1991a:43; Viviani, 1996:80). Unemployment among the Vietnamese is highest during their first years of settlement (83% in 1986), and declines steadily as the period of residence in Australia increases (Coughlan, 1991a:61).

unemployment was only recorded by females aged 55–59 years, while both males and females aged 60–64 recorded rates around 70 per cent.
Viviani (1996:71) claimed that unemployment rates decline rapidly after five years settlement.

The Vietnam-born have been highly concentrated in the less-skilled employment categories, with nearly one-quarter (23.1%) of all employed Vietnamese belonging in the “Intermediate Production and Transport Workers” category and slightly less than one-fifth (18.4%) in the “Labourers and Related Workers” category. This represents an increase of two percentage points in the former category and a decrease of almost four percentage points in the latter. Perhaps the most important changes in occupation have been the increases, for both male and female Vietnamese, employed in Professional (3.6 percentage points increase overall) and Associate Professional (4.5 percentage points) categories between 1991 and 1996 (Bureau of Immigration and Population Research, 1994:23; McMurray, 1999:21).

The leading industries for Vietnam-born men were Manufacturing (23.6%) and Retail Trade (19.7%), while for Vietnamese females it was Retail Trade (23.7%) and Manufacturing (20.4%) (McMurray, 1999:23). However, the overall proportion of workers in these categories has been declining and workers are spread more evenly across industries in 1996 than previously (McMurray, 1999:23).

There has been considerable discussion about the exploitation of immigrants, particularly women, employed as outworkers in the clothing industry. Research in Melbourne and Brisbane found outwork to be widespread among Vietnamese families who were on low wages or otherwise unemployed (Viviani, 1996:91). Burnley (1989:152) has criticised the piecework method of payment in the industry, but acknowledged that this home-based, casual employment was convenient for women with children because of the lack of culturally appropriate childcare. It should also be

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28 Wynhausen (1995:1) incorrectly estimated that more than half of the 300,000 persons engaged in outwork were Vietnamese. This estimate must be incorrect as it is equivalent to the entire Vietnam-born enumerated in the 1996 Census (151,053 persons).
recognised that outwork has also allowed women (and men) with low levels of English proficiency to obtain employment.

**QUALIFICATIONS**

The prevalence of Vietnamese at the unskilled or semi-skilled end of the employment spectrum is also reflected in their qualifications. In 1996, only one-quarter (24.9%) of the Vietnam-born population aged fifteen years and over held educational or occupational qualifications. This proportion is considerably less than all overseas-born (44.2%) and all Australian-born (42.3%). Although 12.1 per cent of Vietnam-born held tertiary qualifications, only 3.4 per cent had acquired skilled or basic vocational training. However, the proportion of Vietnamese without qualifications is declining—from 79.7 per cent in 1991 to 74.1 per cent in 1996—mainly due to the increase in persons with Bachelor Degrees and Associate Diplomas (McMurray, 1999:16).

**LANGUAGE**

One of the most critical factors affecting resettlement is acquiring proficiency in the language of the asylum country, as it affects an individual’s “ability to cope with daily life and realise the opportunities available to them” (Carey-Wood et al., 1995:23). The ability to speak the host language “opens up a range of possibilities, including education, employment and training opportunities, and enhances the ability to cope with daily life and interact with the host community” (Levin cited in Duke, 1995:21). In contrast, failure to learn the host language will keep the refugees socially and economically disadvantaged (Nann, 1982:3).

Poor language proficiency has been identified as one of the major problems of resettlement and is found to be associated with “isolation, unemployment, reticence from neighbours and professionals, and the ability to liaise with and make use of statutory bodies and official services” (Whitham, 1983:55). English as a Second Language (ESL) and labour market service-providers in Australia have claimed that
English proficiency is “the single most important factor influencing chances of employment” (Tran and Holton, 1991:77). Conversely, language problems are a significant barrier to the full participation of Vietnamese in the labour force and often result in long-term unemployment. They restrict persons to unskilled or low skill positions that require only limited English proficiency, prevent them from undertaking labour market training programs, and often lead to people dropping out of the labour market completely (Tran and Holton, 1991:72–73).

Many Vietnamese have encountered problems learning English to a standard that allows them to communicate effectively in everyday situations. Research has found that many possess only poor or inadequate English ability. While language difficulties are widespread among the Vietnamese, it appears they are far greater among those not in the labour force (Tran and Holton, 1991:72). Language problems are also greater for women than men, with almost half (49.8%) of all Vietnam-born women reporting they did not speak English “well” or “at all” in the 1996 Census, compared with 36.3 per cent of all males. The problem is most pronounced among those women aged over sixty-five years, with one in five (22.8%) not speaking English “well” and almost seven out of ten (69.7%) not speaking English “at all” (McMurray, 1999:29).

English proficiency generally improves with length of residence. It is therefore logical to assume that language difficulties are far greater among the newly-arrived. Tran and Holton’s (1991:64) research in New South Wales and South Australia found that language was the greatest problem among Vietnamese refugees in the initial year of settlement (Table 8.6).

29 For example, Tran and Holton (1991:72) obtained data that showed more than half the 1,600 Vietnamese registered for work with the former Commonwealth Employment Service in South Australia possessed only survival English.
Table 8.6

The Greatest Problem Mentioned by Vietnamese in
Their Initial Year of Settlement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>Total Sample per cent</th>
<th>Men per cent</th>
<th>Women per cent</th>
<th>Vietnamese per cent</th>
<th>Chinese per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>61.3</td>
<td>62.0</td>
<td>60.3</td>
<td>61.5</td>
<td>60.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loneliness</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupational work</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial, money</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Tran and Holton, 1991:65

One of the keys to improving English is to undertake language classes. Refugees are entitled to 510 hours of free tuition under the Adult Migrant English Program (Appendix 14). Those who attended language classes after arrival were found to have recorded a “considerable improvement in their perceived ability to communicate effectively” (Victorian Ethnic Affairs Commission, 1983b:84–85).

The Victorian Ethnic Affairs Commission (1983b:84–85) found that people in the greatest need often did not enrol in classes. The Census data discussed above revealed that most Vietnam-born women are in need of language education, however, family demands often make it difficult for them to attend classes. In addition, the opportunity to work—especially outworking in the clothing industry—reduces the desire and time available to devote to learning English. They have little chance to practice English in a work environment, which further entrenches them in these poorly paid positions.
PROFILE OF THE RESPONDENTS IN AUSTRALIA

A total of 640 refugees resettled to nine Australian cities during the ten months of field work at RRTC. Just over forty per cent (40.6% or 260 persons) went to Sydney, and slightly fewer to Melbourne (37.7% or 241 persons)—slightly higher than the proportions of total Vietnam-born living in those cities in 1996 mentioned above. The remaining 139 persons (21.7%) were resettled to seven other major cities (Figure 8.5).

Seventy-six respondents of the original 108 respondents had resettled to Australia by the completion of field work, with Melbourne (32 persons or 42.1%) and Sydney (31 persons or 40.8%) the principal destinations (Figure 8.5). Smaller numbers of respondents settled in Brisbane (5 persons), Adelaide (4), Alice Springs (3) and Canberra (1).

It is necessary to mention that not all refugees ended up at these intended destinations. A small number of refugees at the Regional Resettlement Transit Center were dubious about resettling to some of the smaller capital and regional cities. Some refugees “jumped” aircraft when they were in transit in Melbourne or Sydney waiting to catch connecting flights, and settled in those cities instead. For example, Chin muoi chin mentioned during his interview that he was thinking of disembarking in Sydney rather than resettling in Alice Springs. The respondent questioned the researcher about the positive and negative aspects of resettling to such a regional city and eventually decided to resettle with his family in Alice Springs. Some other refugees—like Ba muoi mot—did not want to resettle in the city that they had obtained sponsorship. Ba muoi mot was scheduled to resettle in Melbourne, but disembarked in Sydney and lived with friends in that city for a few months. He eventually moved to Brisbane to live with other Vietnamese friends he had known in the camps. In both cases these refugees were sponsored through the CRSS and not by friends or relatives. There was also the case of Bay’s husband, who was sent to the wrong city. After an overnight stopover, he continued to Melbourne where he was reunited with his wife and stepdaughter.
Figure 8.5
Resettlement of Vietnamese Refugees to Australia from RRTC, January to October 1994

Source: Field study, 1994
There was evidence of gravitational migration amongst the respondents. Tam muoi chin initially resettled to Adelaide after being sponsored by a CRSS organization there. However, the family of five only stayed there for three months before migrating to Melbourne, where they had more friends and expectations of better employment prospects. There was also the unusual example involving the eldest son of Sau, who migrated to Melbourne after living in New Zealand for three years.

Sixteen of the seventy-six respondents who were known to have resettled were interviewed in Australia: in Melbourne (8), Sydney (5) and Adelaide (3). While the number of contacts was relatively small, it represented a good cross-section of the population initially interviewed. The respondents ranged from twenty-six to seventy-three years of age, with a median age of 38.5 years. Five of the Principal Refugee Applicants (PRAs) were female and eleven were male. In total, including their family members, there were forty-seven persons in the sixteen cases, whose ages ranged from eighteen months to seventy-three years. There were twenty-eight adults and nineteen children, with slightly more males (26) than females (21).30 Eleven of the respondents were married, although two married respondents were single-person cases, with their wives still living overseas: one in Vietnam and the other in the Philippines. One respondent was widowed, two were divorced and two men had never married.

Ten of the respondents were Vietnamese and the remaining six were Viet hoa. The sixteen PRAs practised a variety of religions: six Catholics, five Buddhists, two Cao Dai, two ancestor worshipers and one Protestant. Thirteen respondents had formerly lived in southern Vietnam: over half (seven persons) in Ho Chi Minh City, two in Da Nang, and one person each in Nha Trang, Hue, Tan Binh and Dong Nai. The other three respondents had previously lived in northern Vietnam: two in Quang Ninh province and one in Cham Pha province.

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30 One of the children was a 24 year old male.
The nuclear family—involving two parents and dependent child(ren)—was the most common family structure among respondents, occurring nine times (Table 8.7). This was followed by four single person cases, involving one single male, two married males and a seventy-three year old widowed woman. There were two instances of siblings grouped together, one case involving three brothers and the daughter of one brother and another case of two brothers. There was also one case of a single (divorced) mother and her two teenage children.

Different CRSS organizations, either religious or community groups, sponsored one-quarter (4) of the sixteen cases. The remaining twelve were privately sponsored by family (seven cases) or friends (five cases).

Table 8.7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case size</th>
<th>No of cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single person</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 siblings</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single parent and 2 children</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 person nuclear family</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 person nuclear family</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 person non-nuclear family</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 person nuclear family</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>16</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a – three brothers and the daughter of one brother

Source: Field study, 1995

**GEOGRAPHIC CONCENTRATION**

All five cases in Sydney were living in LGAs with high proportions of Vietnamese: two each in Fairfield (13.6%) and Bankstown (5.4%) and one in Marrickville (5.7%). Seven of the eight respondents in Melbourne were living in areas
of high Vietnamese concentration: three each in Greater Dandenong (8.1%) and Brimbank (6.7%) LGAs, and one in Maribyrnong LGA (13.7%). The eighth respondent was living with his sponsors in Whitehorse LGA, an area of lower Vietnamese settlement.\textsuperscript{31} In Adelaide, two families had settled in Salisbury LGA—where Vietnamese concentration is relatively high (2.1%)—and one in Port Adelaide (1.7%).\textsuperscript{32}

The settlement of respondents in high concentration areas was brought about by the high degree of private sponsorship, with all twelve private sponsors living in areas with relatively high proportions of Vietnamese. In addition, three of the four CRSS-sponsored respondents were provided with accommodation in these areas.

There are two nodes of Vietnamese settlement in Melbourne: one in the western suburbs and another in the southeast. It was interesting to note that three of the four respondents who lived in the western suburbs of Melbourne were northern Vietnamese. This settlement raises the question whether there is any spatial differentiation in the settlement of Vietnamese in Melbourne—i.e. whether the concentration of northern Vietnamese in Melbourne is different to the settlement of southern Vietnamese. It would be beneficial to further investigate the origins of Vietnamese in Melbourne. If different settlement patterns exist for northern and southern Vietnamese, this could have ramifications in the provision of settlement services.

**RESPONDENT HOUSING**

One of the major needs of refugees during the initial period of settlement is housing, which is seen by Waxman (1998:762) as “the first step in reaching normalcy”.

The provision of accommodation by the sponsor is one of the conditions of

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{31} Whitehorse LGA (formerly the Cities of Nunawading and Box Hill) was not in the list of “Top 20” areas of Vietnamese concentration at the 1996 Census (McMurray, 1999:8). However, the former Eastbridge migrant hostel was located in the suburb of Nunawading, so that the area had previously been a focus for some migrant settlement.

\textsuperscript{32} The respondent living in Port Adelaide was on the very edge of the LGA, next to the high concentration LGA of Enfield. The house he lived in was very close to the former Pennington Migrant Hostel.
\end{footnotesize}
Refugees who are sponsored by relatives or friends often stay with their sponsors for an extended period of time. For example, Bay stayed with her sister for three months, until her husband was also resettled. Both Mot muoi mot and Chin muoi mot were also staying with family, although not the family-members who sponsored them. Sau muoi sau had been living with his Vietnamese sponsors/friends for eight months at the time of interview. His sponsors, who had also arrived as refugees, stated that they realised the need for Sau muoi sau and his family to get “settled properly” before moving out on their own, so were in no hurry for him to leave. Ba muoi bon had been staying with his Australian CRSS-sponsors for ten months, and had no intentions of leaving in the near future. Sometimes the accommodation provided by sponsors was only short-term. For example, Ba muoi tam was only provided with accommodation by the CRSS organization for two weeks, before she had to move into her own flat. This is an extremely short period of support considering the many difficulties involved in the initial settlement period. The brevity of support is obviously one of the consequences of being sponsored by an organization that sponsors large numbers of refugees. There were also refugees such as Bon, who did not live with relatives or sponsors upon arrival, but moved in with friends already resettled in Sydney.

Half of the respondents had already moved into rented flats by the time field work commenced in Australia (Table 8.8). Six of the cases in flats were residing on their own, while Bon muoi tam and the elderly Nam muoi ba were both staying in flats with other Vietnamese families. The other eight respondents were living in houses, under various arrangements. Both Sau and Tam muoi chin, and their families, were

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33 The conditions of sponsorship, as stipulated by the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (1997b), include:

- arranging sole-occupancy accommodation in a house or unit (of at least average local standard) which is close to public transport and settlement services and where the arrivals can be visited regularly;
- ensuring the arrivals have information about, and know how to find all relevant services in the community, such as health and welfare, education, transport, information and recreation;
- encouraging the arrivals to learn English and about living in Australia, either by attending English language and orientation courses (where these are available) or by undertaking other English language tuition; and generally helping them to adjust to living in Australia.
living in rented houses after initial periods of living with sponsors. In Melbourne, Mot muoi mot and Chin muoi mot were living in houses that they shared with other family members. Bon muoi tam, Sau muoi sau and Hai muoi sau were all still living in houses with their Vietnam-born sponsors (the latter was his family) and Ba muoi bon was living with his Australian sponsors.

Table 8.8
Accommodation of Vietnamese respondents in Australia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accommodation type</th>
<th>Number of cases</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rented flat</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>43.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rented house (sole occupants)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rented house (shared occupants)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>25.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living in sponsor’s house</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>16</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field study, 1995

LABOUR FORCE

It was not surprising to find only five people—four males and one female—out of the twenty-eight adults in the study population were working at the time of field work in Australia. However, only the husband of Bay was working full-time—in a factory position—which had been found for him by his wife’s family. Bay also worked in a casual position at home sorting coloured coat-hanger labels for a large department store chain. Two other respondents—Chin muoi mot and Ba muoi bon—had part-time positions, one washing dishes in a restaurant and another labouring in a fruit stall. The fifth person—Bon—worked at home, sewing clothing. Ba muoi nam’s brother told how he had previously worked in a wood-working factory, but had to stop because the dust caused problems with his lungs. He was somewhat dejected that he could only ever obtain “dirty” work. All the men who worked had reasonably good standards of English, while Bay only had a basic understanding that was not at a conversational level.
It was clearly evident during field work that a number of Vietnamese refugees were being employed as outworkers in the clothing industry. *Bon* was previously a tailor in Vietnam, and began working as an outworker shortly after his arrival in Australia. He worked together with his girlfriend, also an outworker, in a room of their house that was used as a sewing room. The couple were busy sewing shirts on the evening when the researcher first visited their home. They received one dollar for each garment they completed. *Tam muoi chin*, who was also a tailor in Vietnam, told how his wife was undertaking sewing lessons so she could obtain work sewing. It was likely that both would be employed as outworkers. *Ba muoi tam* had a commercial sewing machine in the kitchen of her flat, and it is presumed she was doing some work sewing. *Bon*’s girlfriend and *Tam muoi chin*’s wife both had small children, which would have made other types of work difficult. In addition, *Tam muoi chin*, his wife, and *Ba muoi tam*, all had poor English language ability, which would have also made it hard to find other employment. *Tam muoi chin*’s age—sixty years—would also be a considerable constraint on him obtaining other employment.

**LANGUAGE**

Only eleven of the twenty-eight adults were proficient in English before they arrived in Australia, with eight having learnt English at the PFAC, while three had studied privately at one of the Hong Kong camps. A greater proportion of children had gained some English language skills than among adults, with eleven of the twelve school-age children being proficient.\(^3^4\) It was interesting to hear two of the better English speakers, *Bon* and *Ba muoi nam*, both comment that they needed to improve their English skills. Although they had completed the highest English classes in the Philippines, they both felt that this was still below the standard required in Australia.

\(^{34}\) Seven of the nineteen children had not yet attended school.
The researcher noted that most of the seventeen respondents who had previously not spoken any or only little English showed a notable improvement in their English proficiency. They were generally willing to attempt to communicate in English, even if it was only basic. However, two women, both mothers of small children, had improved only marginally. Only two of the elderly women did not display any noticeable improvement in their English ability. However, it was also noticeable that there was increased reluctance among some respondents to complete their English classes as opportunities for outwork employment arose. For example, Ba muoi tam’s daughter explained that her mother was becoming increasingly reluctant to complete her English classes as she was working at home.

It was pleasing to hear that the respondents were actively encouraging their children to continue their education. Sau stated that he wanted his children to receive a good education in Australia. Ba muoi nam also mentioned that he wanted his daughter to do well at school, and that he was ready to sacrifice some personal things in order that she could receive the best education possible. Some of the older children, such as Ba muoi tam’s son were achieving good grades and already had intentions to undertake a university degree. All twelve school age children claimed to be enjoying their school experiences.

**SOME RESETTLEMENT EXPERIENCES**

The sixteen respondents interviewed in Australia had, as could be expected, encountered very different experiences during their initial period of resettlement. Factors such as age, English proficiency, family details, sponsorship arrangements, and existing support network of family and/or friends all influenced the resettlement experiences. It is difficult to quantify how successfully the sixteen respondents and their family members had resettled, as this depends on the definition of successful, what criteria are applied—e.g. economic, psycho-social, political—and the researcher's
interpretation of events (Higgett, 1992). However, despite these limitations, it was apparent that some refugees had experienced fewer problems than others, and thus had adapted to life in Australia more quickly.

Probably the most successfully resettled case, if economic criteria were used, would be Bay. Both she and her husband had obtained employment and her daughter was at high school. They were living independently in a pleasant two-bedroom flat, which was well appointed with furniture and electrical appliances. Bay’s husband stated that they hoped to purchase a car in the near future to become more independent. There were two main factors in this family’s success. First was the excellent support they received from Bay’s sister and her family, who had sponsored their resettlement to Australia. After initially housing the family, they later helped them find their own accommodation, assisted by providing them with furniture, as well as employment for both Bay and her husband. They also assisted the family, especially the husband, with transport to work and shopping. A second factor was the husband’s excellent command of English prior to resettlement, which allowed him to work in a factory without first studying English in Australia. He was the only person reinterviewed who was receiving a full-time wage. This, combined with Bay’s outwork, provided the family with a good income. Bay’s husband still had intentions to continue his education at a later date so that he could eventually become a translator. Bay’s husband had also been politically active—attending a meeting in Canberra to protest about the repatriation of Vietnamese asylum-seekers from Hong Kong. Despite their economic security, it was possible that this family could suffer some problems. Bay’s poor English skills, the family’s location in South Springvale—some distance from the main shopping area—and the fact that Bay worked casually at home, could all contribute to her suffering from isolation—a frequent problem among Vietnamese women in Australia.

The person who experienced the most difficulties during the first year of resettlement was Nam muoi ba. Like many elderly refugees, this seventy-three year old woman had elected to opt out of any form of active adaptation and relied solely on the
support and efforts of her daughter-in-law, who had sponsored her. This reliance led to intra-familial stress, which together with Nam muoi ba’s isolation and loneliness, eventually led her to leave. She moved residence four times within the first year trying to find an acceptable living arrangement. At the time of the interview she was living with an unrelated Vietnamese family she had known from the refugee camp, paying board for one of the three bedrooms in a two-storey apartment. This is not an isolated incident, as “Vietnamese community workers estimate that about 5,000 elderly Vietnamese are either homeless or have been abandoned by their children” (Coughlan and Walsh, 1994:103).

There is no doubt that elderly refugees, like most elderly migrants, encounter severe problems in their resettlement, especially as traditional extended family arrangements are not necessarily continued in Australia. The situation of older refugee women is of particular concern, as they are often isolated, even within family structures. They have greater difficulty learning English and other skills, and they have little chance for employment. In addition, the older woman’s traditional role in the family has often been eroded after resettlement. Elderly women are less likely to socially interact with English-speaking people than their male counterparts. Finlay and Reynolds (cited in Crosland, 1991:4) found that their gender, ethnic minority status, age and restricted access to key services placed older women in a situation of “quadruple jeopardy”.

The remaining fourteen cases lay somewhere between these two extremes—varying according to the resettlement factors mentioned above. The extensive variations make it difficult to classify these cases into groups. Therefore, a brief summary of each will be presented to provide some token of the varied resettlement experiences.

Bon never sought assistance from his sponsor—a friend he had known at the Palawan asylum camp—but reunited immediately with his girlfriend and lived with her and her family in Bankstown (NSW). Bon’s girlfriend had been working as an outworker before his arrival, and he joined her in this work. The very affable, twenty-nine year old male had a large social network in the local area. Although Bon (and also
his girlfriend) possessed good English skills, he claimed these were not adequate and that he would need to attend language classes. He appeared satisfied doing casual outwork while attending language classes, and stated that he would look for other employment later.

Although sixty-five year old Sau and his wife had few English language skills, their settlement experience had been greatly assisted by their three teenage children and an adult son. The older couple had initially received strong support from their sponsors, a CRSS organization. They were living in the western suburbs of Melbourne, where they had a considerable friendship network. It is probable that the three teenage children will face a certain degree of pressure—to complete their education and to find employment—in the future. The eldest son had been placed in the difficult position of having to migrate after living in New Zealand for three years. It is not known what impact this upheaval would have had on the young man, but it could have been a major disruption to his life. Hopefully, it was balanced by being reunited with his family.

Mot muoi mot, her husband and young son were living in Springvale with her brother and his family. They had been sponsored by another brother, who did not live with them. They were still very reliant on a large family support network. Mot muoi mot still had rather poor English skills, probably a legacy of caring for their son, while her husband had a higher standard. The husband claimed that he was looking for employment, but had not yet found anything. The family stated that they would remain living with her brother for the immediate future.

Hai muoi sau was also still living with his family—his parents and siblings—who had resettled to Australia before him and subsequently sponsored him. Although Hai muoi sau had reasonably good English skills before arriving in Australia, he was continuing his Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) classes. It was envisaged that Hai muoi sau would have few difficulties resettling in Australia because of his good language skills, young age and strong family support.
In contrast, *Ba muoi* and his wife were likely to have more difficulties. Neither of them had any English skills before arriving in Australia and both were in their forties. Although there had been a noticeable improvement as a result of attending language classes, their proficiency was still poor. The couple—with two children—had moved from their sponsor’s house (the wife’s brother) to a nearby flat. They still relied heavily on the wife’s family for support. The two children were both enjoying primary school. *Ba muoi* was hoping to obtain work as a bricklayer when he finished his language classes.

*Ba muoi bon* had been living with his CRSS sponsors—an Australian family in the Melbourne suburb of Box Hill—for ten months. His major concern was that his wife—who had been rejected for refugee status—was still in the Philippines First Asylum Camp. His major concern was how he could get his wife out to Australia. *Ba muoi bon* had very good English skills prior to arriving in Australia. This was probably a major factor in him obtaining part-time employment in a local fruit stall. *Ba muoi bon* appeared to still be relying heavily on his sponsors and had little contact with other refugees he had known in the Philippines.

The composition of *Ba muoi nam*’s case was quite unusual—involving three adult brothers and the teenage daughter of one man. The brothers had experienced some problems during their first year in Australia. Although they had initially lived together, one of the brothers wanted to become more independent and moved out. However, because of widespread personal and financial problems, the brothers were living together again. It appeared as though the three middle-aged men all held different aspirations for the future, which had caused some conflict. It is also possible that the family was lacking external support because apart from the immediate family, there were no other relatives in Australia.

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35 The couple had married after her decision was handed down. Consequently, she did not receive her husband’s refugee status.
The important role played by children in the refugee family was also apparent in the case of *Ba muoi tam*. The forty-three year-old divorced woman received considerable support from her two teenage children who had escaped with her, as well as from an older son who had fled Vietnam earlier with his father. All three children had excellent English skills. *Ba muoi tam* had not previously spoken English, but after six months of tuition in Australia could now hold a basic conversation. However, she was apparently reluctant to continue with her English classes. It is presumed that *Ba muoi tam* was about to begin working as an outworker at home. A devout Buddhist, *Ba muoi tam* also spent considerable time at the local temple.

*Bon muoi tam* was a thirty-nine year old married man, although his wife was still in Vietnam. His major concern was how to sponsor his wife and children to Australia. He did not speak any English before he arrived in Australia, but was currently undertaking AMEP classes. He had moved from his sponsor’s house into a house with other Vietnamese friends.

*Sau muoi sau* was still living in a house with his Vietnamese sponsors. Both he and his wife were receiving considerable support from the sponsoring family. For example, the sponsor was teaching *Sau muoi sau* to drive. The sponsor stated he knew the difficulties involved in resettlement because he had also arrived as a refugee. Consequently, he would allow *Sau muoi sau* to remain living with him as long as necessary. *Sau muoi sau* was studying English, but it remained at a low standard. His wife, who also had to care for their small child, had a lower level of English.

*Tam muoi chin* had originally settled in Adelaide. However, after three months the family of five moved to Melbourne. The motive for the move was apparently to be closer to friends and better employment prospects. *Tam muoi chin* had shown a remarkable improvement in his English proficiency—from virtually none to a conversational standard. As mentioned previously, it appeared that both *Tam muoi chin* and his wife were to work as outworkers.
Another young and vibrant refugee was Chin muoi mot. This thirty year old Viet hoa was the seventh sibling in the family to have resettled to Australia over almost twenty years. He had been sponsored by his eldest brother, who had fled Vietnam during the Hoa exodus of 1978–1979. However, Chin muoi mot, his wife and children were living with other family members in Melbourne. Chin muoi mot had previously not spoken English, but was now able to converse quite well in English. He was still attending AMEP classes and also working part-time washing dishes in a restaurant. His ambition was to obtain work as a cook in a Vietnamese restaurant.

Tam muoi ba and his wife and infant son were living in a small but pleasant flat in one of Melbourne’s western suburbs. They were very focused on improving their English, attending AMEP classes three times a week. The couple had improved their English skills considerably, yet their work prospects were not overly-bright.

Mot tram tam had lived with her family, who were her sponsors, in Adelaide for two months waiting for her husband to be resettled. The family continued to live in the sponsor’s house for another two months after the husband arrived in Australia. They subsequently moved into a small flat by themselves in the same area. They continued to rely on their sponsors for support. Both Mot tram tam and her husband exhibited improvements in English proficiency. Mot tram tam’s husband stated that he would look for employment after he had finished his AMEP classes, while Mot tram tam would probably remain at home looking after their daughter.

While there was considerable variation in resettlement experiences amongst the adults in the study, there was far less difference among the older children. Discussions were held with seven teenagers and a young adult—from six families—and they all claimed to be enjoying their resettlement in Australia. In general, these teenagers appeared to be having few problems in their resettlement. They were all continuing their education, while the tenth person was looking for work. Importantly, all had some comprehension of English before they arrived in Australia. The study supported Haines (1996:29) finding that children “adjust more quickly and completely to new customs".
However, children do encounter their own problems during resettlement. Their quick adaptation to Western culture often creates problems with their slower-adapting parents, who usually wish their children to retain some of the more traditional aspects of their culture. This can lead to inter-familial stress, which can eventually force the child to leave home. Fortunately, it did not appear as though any child in the study group had yet reached this crisis-point.

**SUMMARY: EXPECTATIONS—FULFILLED OR FAILED?**

It was evident during field work in the Philippines that many refugees had high expectations about their new life in Australia, especially their economic and occupational adjustment. It was obvious that many of these expectations were unrealistic, especially in the short-term. For example, many respondents believed that there would be numerous employment and educational (particularly tertiary education) opportunities waiting for them. Yet few of the refugees had adequate language ability to pursue these dreams. As mentioned previously, even those refugees with better language ability were surprised by the difficulties awaiting them in Australia. It was evident that none of the refugees interviewed in Australia had fulfilled their expectations within their first year of resettlement, and that only one was likely to fulfil them in the near future.

The difficulties that many refugees endure during the first year of resettlement may reflect a lack of preparedness for what was to follow. The previous experiences of refugees—both in Vietnam and in asylum country—had not equipped them adequately for life in Australia. It was apparent that the refugees would have benefited from more intensive language and cultural orientation classes in the refugee camp as a pre-requisite to resettlement. It was noticeable that the teenage children, who had all studied English in the camps, were in many ways better prepared for resettlement.
It is difficult to predict how this cohort of sixteen respondents, their spouses and children will adapt to living in Australia in the future. It was evident that some refugees in the study had experienced more difficulties than others and this is likely to continue in the future. It was also apparent that the adaptive patterns of refugees vary considerably. This study found that settlement experiences were heavily influenced by factors such as age, gender, language ability, family, existing social network in Australia, educational and vocational background and contact with wider community. It was difficult to determine whether sponsorship type—family/friend or CRSS—was a major variable, because of the small numbers involved. However, the study found that it was the quality of post-arrival support that was the most important factor.

The field work supported the Victorian Ethnic Affairs Commission’s (1983b:118) finding that family and friends play a crucial role supporting new arrivals by providing information and assistance, especially in matters concerning housing, employment and education. It found that respondents relied on a network of family and/or friends to provide the guidance that Taylor and Nathan (cited in Stein 1981:328) claimed was needed during the initial stages of resettlement.

The reliance on sponsors and/or family was evident with Mot muoi mot, Hai muoi sau and Chin muoi mot all still living with family. In addition, Ba muoi bon was still living with his CRSS sponsors and Sau muoi sau with his private sponsors. Only one of the four CRSS-sponsored cases had not received long-term support. However, even in this case, there was additional support from family already in Australia. Conversely, the situation with Nam muoi ba, detailed above, showed the difficulties that could occur when the family support network broke down.

The major commitment by refugees during the initial period of resettlement was to attend AMEP classes. The majority of refugees interviewed had undertaken English tuition during the earlier resettlement period and this was reflected by widespread improvements in English proficiency. However, it was evident that some of the women with young children—such as Mot muoi mot, Sau muoi Sau’s wife, Chin muoi mot’s
wife and Mot tram nam—were having some difficulties completing their tuition and their English had not improved as quickly as their husbands.

The benefits of good English skills were clearly evident among the refugees reinterviewed. Five of the six refugees who had worked at some time during their resettlement were highly competent in English. In contrast, the employment prospects of many of those refugees with poorer English skills, such as Ba muoi tam, Sau muoi sau and his wife and Tam muoi chin and his wife, appeared bleak and probably restricted to underpaid outwork.

Fourteen of the sixteen cases appeared to still be in the euphoric stage of resettlement at the time of their interview in Australia. These refugees were generally happy about their experiences and optimistic about their future. Only two refugees may have moved from the euphoric phase into the next, disillusionment, phase. The first of these was Nam muoi ba, who had encountered considerable problems during her first year. Nevertheless, she still claimed that she preferred to live in Australia than in Vietnam. The second refugee who had voiced some negative comments about resettlement was Ba muoi nam’s brother. He was particularly disillusioned at the difficulty of finding satisfactory employment, and that he was restricted to low-level jobs. The resettlement experiences of many of the other refugees may lead them through into a disillusioned period before they finally recover.

The arrival in paradise of this cohort of Vietnamese refugees is not the end of the refugee experience, as it continues many years after the resettlement process begins (Furcinitti, 1992, iii). The history of Vietnamese resettlement in Australia over the last twenty-five years shows that some members of this community will endure many difficulties in their resettlement, such as high unemployment and underemployment, declining levels of labour force participation, exploitation in the work force, etc. However, there is also sufficient evidence available to suggest that many of these refugees, particularly the younger ones, will successfully adapt to living in their adopted country.
It is important to emphasise one final point about the resettlement of this cohort of Vietnamese refugees. Despite the difficulties that some of the refugees had suffered, there was widespread reluctance among refugees to denounce any aspect of their resettlement in Australia. Instead, the refugees were extremely grateful for being given the opportunity to resettle in this "freedom country". It was apparent that even though some of the refugees had suffered—and would continue to suffer—some difficulties in the resettlement stage, these problems were not as threatening as those that they had experienced beforehand—both in Vietnam and in Hong Kong and the Philippines.
THE STAGES OF VIETNAMESE REFUGEE MIGRATION TO AUSTRALIA UNDER THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN OF ACTION

20 years ago—We started from zero
With only our hearts and our souls
20 years have passed us by
We sure have learned, we sure have tried
So far we’ve done so fine.

We have got students in thousands
Whose future here will blossom
And will give hands to build this great nation
With men working hard
And women taking part
We gave our best to you, Australia.

20 years ago, starting from zero
We gave it all, hearts and souls
20 years have passed us by
We sure have learned, we sure have tried
Australians now ... You and I.

Through social integration
We’ve made our contribution
To the welfare of this one society
This land is young and free
And it’s there for you and me
Together we live in harmony.

Anonymous

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1 Song written for (and performed at) a conference to commemorate 20 Years of Vietnamese Contribution 1975-1995, held at Marrickville Town Hall, 22 April 1995.
INTRODUCTION

The examination of the migration of Vietnamese refugees undertaken in this research has revealed considerable changes to the refugee experience following the milestone introduction of the Comprehensive Plan of Action (CPA) in 1989. Under the conditions of the CPA, refugee status was not automatically granted to all arrivals, but required asylum-seekers to establish their refugee status during screening procedures. Those persons granted refugee status were eligible for resettlement to the West, while those rejected were required to repatriate to Vietnam.

As a result of these changes, previous models of the stages of refugee migration—such as those proposed by Keller (1975), Liu et al. (1979), Baker (1983) and Ager (1999)—were found to be inappropriate to portray Vietnamese refugee migration to Australia (and other Western countries) in the 1990s. Consequently, it was necessary to construct a new model to include all stages and processes evident in Vietnamese refugee migration during the last decade. The resulting six-stage model (Figure 9.1) is based largely on Baker’s original 1983 model, but also incorporates elements from Keller (1975), Liu et al. (1979) and Koehn (1991). It is necessary to reiterate Baker’s (1983:5) earlier caution that there may be some individual variation of responses where a refugee does not fit the model exactly. In addition, it must be emphasised that this

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2 The models proposed by Keller (1975), Liu et al. (1979) and Baker (1983) were not satisfactory for explaining Vietnamese refugee migration following the introduction of the Comprehensive Plan of Action because they did not distinguish the stages before and after refugee determination. There is a need to distinguish the “asylum camp” stage (before obtaining refugee status) from the “refugee camp” stage (after successful screening).

Both Keller (1975) and Baker (1983) distinguished “Reaching Safety” from the “Refugee Camp Experience”, but did not provide sufficient information about the former stage. Consequently, the “Reaching Safety” stage was somewhat ambiguous, and it is not apparent when it ends and the next stage begins. As a result of investigation in this study, it was thought more appropriate to only include the place of asylum—which was the camp—as asylum-seekers were generally moved straight to a reception centre or an asylum camp upon arrival.

Baker’s (1983) sixth stage—“Reception in a Host Country”—described refugees who lived in a reception centre upon arrival in Britain. Australia closed its migrant hostels in the early 1990s. Consequently, while some aspects of the stage are appropriate, others are not.

All three models included different stages of resettlement. However, this study found it more appropriate to discuss resettlement as one stage—composed of a number of resettlement phases.
Figure 9.1
Stages of Vietnamese Refugee Migration under the Comprehensive Plan of Action
model is based on the migration of Vietnamese refugees who sought asylum in either Hong Kong or the Philippines after the introduction of the CPA and subsequently resettled to Australia via the Philippines. The refugee experiences of those who arrived in and resettled from other first asylum countries, to other countries, and at other times, may have varied slightly as government asylum and resettlement polices changed. It should also be noted that the experiences of refugees under the CPA were markedly different from those experienced by refugees prior to the introduction of the 1989 document.

THE STAGES OF VIETNAMESE REFUGEE MIGRATION

LIVING IN HELL AND THE PERIOD OF THREAT

The initial stage of the refugee experience—identified by both Keller (1975) and Baker (1983)—is “Living in Hell and the Period of Threat”. It is during this stage that conditions in the home country deteriorate for the potential refugee and they become aware that they—or members of their group—“are being victimised, repressed, persecuted, threatened with annihilation or have actual evidence that some of their group are being tortured and/or killed” (Baker, 1983:5).

This current study supports previous evidence of oppression identified by numerous Vietnamese and Western authors. It found that the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV) deliberately targeted, and subsequently persecuted, sections of the population upon the reunification of the two Vietnams in 1975. Furthermore, the study found that the establishment of a multi-tiered society in Vietnam had dire consequences on those who were relegated to the bottom levels of society—principally those previously associated with the South Vietnam military and administration; ethnic minorities, especially the Chinese; Christians, particularly Catholics; and others—causing their living conditions to become miserable. Interviews with refugee
respondents found that the Vietnamese government and its officials subjected individuals and groups to various forms of persecution and discrimination, ranging from the loss of food rights to reeducation, torture and imprisonment, over a long period of time. Respondents frequently claimed that the social victimisation was family-based, with children discriminated against because of their parents’ participation in either the South Vietnamese government or armed forces before 1975 and Viet hoa families discriminated against because of their ethnicity. Usually there was no reinstatement of citizen or human rights after they had been confiscated. The overall consequences of the government’s actions were that many people in Vietnam had to endure deplorable living conditions after 1975.

THE DECISION TO FLEE

Allen and Hiller (1985:440) noted that not all people who live under conditions of oppression and deprivation become refugees. Therefore, it is necessary to distinguish why some people elect to flee, while others do not. Baker (1983:5) claimed that a critical component in becoming a refugee is that at some point in time the social victimisation exerted on potential refugees becomes intolerable. This is supported by Koehn (1991:45), who identified four types of intolerable stress that lead to refugee flight:

1. physical dislocation and rootlessness, which results from war or forced removal;
2. economic destitution, resulting from the violent destruction or confiscation of a person’s means of production, the ban or limitation of relief and rehabilitation items, and the coerced loss or elimination of employment;
3. personal or family danger, which occurs from random acts of violence, war-zone conditions, and/or the threat of imprisonment, torture and execution; and
4. ideological alienation, which stems from a fear of execution and torture by the state and/or the suppression of alternative political discourse by force. In addition, “violence, or the fear of violence, induced by prevailing political conditions and/or personal experience, can be associated with each type of stress perception” (Koehn, 1991:45).

All four of these stress perceptions were evident among respondents in the study population. Physical dislocation and rootlessness was widespread in post-war Vietnam as the SRV government coerced and even forcibly relocated sections of the population. Some persons considered loyal to the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV) government were moved to politically and militarily strategic locations along the Cambodian, Laotian and Chinese borders. However, the majority of the urban-rural movements consisted of persons considered “undesirable”, such as former members of the South Vietnam government or military, landlords, Viet hoa, Catholics, ethnic minorities and the urban poor. Seventeen respondents in this study experienced physical dislocation and rootlessness because they had been forced to relocate to New Economic Zones, where they endured harsh and difficult environments. Most respondents could not cope with the conditions in the NEZs and elected to return to their towns and cities of origin, where they lived illegally, and thus under great difficulty. The testimonies of Nam, Ba muoi ba and Tam muoi mot are typical of this group of respondents.

A sizeable proportion of the Vietnamese population, particularly those of Chinese background, suffered economic destitution as a result of the government’s purge against all perceived bourgeois elements of society. The confiscation of businesses and prohibition of conducting certain industries, previously detailed in Chapter 2, was no doubt a major cause of stress perception. Six respondents—including Chin muoi mot and Chin muoi ba—reported that their families were considered capitalists and consequently lost their businesses and their means of production. The government’s discrimination against elements of the population—such as the Viet hoa and those formerly associated with the South Vietnamese regime—also affected many
people obtain employment. For example, a number of respondents claimed that they had difficulty obtaining employment because of their family’s background.

The perception of personal or family danger resulting from the threat of imprisonment, torture and execution was experienced by a large number of respondents prior to their escape. It is impossible to determine exactly how many of the 108 respondents were actually threatened. However, fourteen respondents (13.0%) stated that their reason for escaping from Vietnam was because they had previously been imprisoned, for a variety of reasons. It is logical that the number of respondents actually threatened would have been considerably greater. For example, Tam muoi hai and Sau muoi nam both claimed that they fled because of perceived or actual threats of imprisonment.

Most respondents would have considered that their ideology was different from that espoused by the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. However, thirteen respondents explicitly stated that they had fled Vietnam because they held different ideological beliefs than the government, with some respondents claiming that the government suppressed their political dialogue. In addition, there were also twelve respondents who claimed that they fled Vietnam because of the policies of the communist government. Three respondents who escaped because of religious persecution could perhaps be added to this group.

An analysis of respondents’ reasons for fleeing Vietnam indicates that the major generator of these stress perceptions was discrimination by the SRV government. Over forty per cent (42.6% or 46 persons) of respondents stated that they had fled Vietnam because they were discriminated against—either because of their family’s association with the former South Vietnam regime, being an ethnic minority, their religious beliefs (particularly Catholicism), retaliation against a family member escaping, or other types of discrimination. The second major cause of stress perception was opposition to the SRV polices (12 persons) or ideology (13 persons), while the third reason was imprisonment by the government.
This study found that there was frequently more than one stress perception generated. For example, the government confiscated the plastics factory belonging to Chin muoi ba’s family (economic destitution) and forced them to move to a New Economic Zone (physical dislocation) because they were considered “an element of capitalism”. His father was later arrested and imprisoned (personal and family danger). Chin muoi ba claimed that he could not live under a government that generated such oppressive conditions. This was not an isolated case and many respondents suffered from multiple stress perceptions.

The decision to become a refugee was considered by Koehn (1991:45) to be a two-part process. Once conditions become intolerable, the person becoming a refugee first considers flight as a possible solution. This decision is often made after exploring the alternatives with family or friends (Allen and Hiller, 1985:444). The impending refugee must be aware of escape opportunities and “possess the capacity and courage to take advantage of an opening” (Koehn, 1991:47). Allen and Hiller (1985:443) and Koehn (1991:47) claimed that this requires the development of a flight perspective, which is acquired through social interaction. The flight perspective includes gaining some knowledge of possible destinations, together with the understanding that leaving their homeland is not a deviant act but “normative and necessary behaviour” (Allen and Hiller, 1985:443) and “an appropriate, feasible and logical course of action” (Fagen and O’Leary cited in Koehn, 1991:47). Allen and Hiller (1985:444) argued that for many Vietnamese refugees the idea of escaping “developed naturally in the course of conversations about the bad conditions in the country”. These discussions established contacts with others who shared the same objective. Furthermore, many respondents disclosed that they were aware of different avenues to escape and knew people who had previously escaped. In fact, they frequently received letters from friends and family in first asylum and/or resettlement countries who informed prospective refugees about escape routes, conditions in the camps and resettlement countries and requirements to establish refugee status.
The second part of the decision-making process identified by Koehn (1991:45), is when the potential refugee decides to flee their homeland. Both Baker (1983:5) and Koehn (1991:45) contend that considerable time may elapse between the two decisions, or they might occur almost simultaneously. This variation in the time between deciding to escape and actually escaping was particularly evident among respondents. For example, sixty-six respondents (61.1%) attempted to escape on more than one occasion, which meant that there usually a considerable period between the initial decision to flee and the successful attempt. Even when discussing their successful escape, there was usually a considerable period of waiting from the first contact with the organisers and leaving Vietnam. Only six respondents claimed that they had less than one day’s notice of their impending departure, while another nineteen had between one and six day’s notice. At the other extreme, eight respondents claimed that they waited for six months, while one respondent had to wait more than one year.

Koehn (1991:47) also maintained that the impending refugee must decide what their destination would be. However, the frequent use of mediators (or middlemen) by would-be refugees meant that individual refugees usually had little choice about their destination, which was made by the boat owners or organisers. Only those refugees involved in organising their own departure would have had been required to make a decision about their destination.

Once the decision to escape had been made, the impending refugee had to make arrangements to escape. A person could organise his or her own departure, or else pay someone else to arrange it. Those who elected the former option could buy a boat—or a share in a boat. This involved considerable organization, as the boat had to be equipped with fuel, water and food for the voyage, and then harboured until the departure date. All this had to be done in secret to avoid detection by the authorities. Those who

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3 Those who escaped overland to China sometimes had more influence on their escape route. The vast majority of departures from northern and northern-central Vietnam went to Hong Kong.
wanted to pay for their passage had to find an organiser or boat-owner who they trusted and negotiate a price for the journey. This research concurs with Allen and Hiller’s (1985:446) findings, that the period after arrangements were made was one of considerable apprehension. Allen and Hiller’s (1985:446) commented that potential refugees suffered considerable anxiety, worrying whether they would be cheated by boat-owners, reported to the authorities, or arrive at the departure point undetected. The potential refugees also had to make personal arrangements before their voyage, such as selling off personal belongings to raise money and prepare food, water and medications for the voyage, which could also cause officials to become suspicious.

**FLIGHT**

Refugee flight from Vietnam has generally been depicted as the exodus of the boat people in overcrowded fishing boats that were unsuited and ill equipped for such journeys. The boats risked detection by government officials, which could lead to the confiscation of property, loss of rights and even imprisonment of those aboard. After leaving Vietnamese territorial waters, refugees risked being robbed, raped and/or murdered by pirates, their flimsy craft risked collision with large vessels as they crossed the busy navigation channels, and there was the ever-present risk of storms. These dangers are typical of the perils faced by respondents who fled to the Philippines (and other South East Asian asylum countries).

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4 For a detailed description of organising a boat escape see Nguyen and Kendall (1981).

5 Many of the boats acquired for escapes were river or coastal craft that were not suited to long ocean voyages. They were often fishing or cargo vessels that had been crudely improvised to carry human payload and lacked suitable navigation equipment, such as compasses and charts. Although the boat-owner was supposed to supply provisions for the voyage, there was usually insufficient fuel, water and food for the trip. (See Chapter 5)
However, not all refugee flights were such risky and hazardous journeys. This study found that the overland escape route through China greatly reduced the dangers. Although those refugees who travelled north still risked detection by government officials when travelling within the country, these risks were not as great as boarding a boat. The reasons for a train or bus journey north could be more easily disguised, than those for boarding a boat. Border-crossings into China were relatively easy, and it was not difficult to evade Vietnamese officials. Once in China the predominantly Viet hoa who travelled this route could journey easily towards Hong Kong, with the knowledge that they were unlikely to be returned to Vietnam even if they were discovered. The short sea voyage from the Chinese mainland to Hong Kong was far less dangerous than the previously mentioned ocean voyages.

A small number of respondents also travelled north from Vietnam by boat, never venturing far from sight of the Chinese coast. The risks of this method were intermediate—greater than the land journeys but less than the ocean voyages.

Interviews with respondents disclosed a wide variety of escape attempts, in boats of varying descriptions, which lasted between three days and seven months. Baker (1983:6) claimed that during flight individuals “become acutely aware of a number of obstacles and constraints that could prevent them reaching a place of asylum”. Almost three-quarters of respondents in this study reported that they encountered obstacles during their boat journey, such as a lack of food, water and/or fuel, mechanical breakdowns and storms at sea. In many instances, especially the voyages to the Philippines, respondents questioned whether they would ever reach safety. For example, Bay muoi bon told how he thought he would die at sea after encountering some large storms.

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6 There were also overland routes through Cambodia and, to a lesser extent, Laos. However, these were outside the scope of this inquiry.
REACHING ASYLUM AND LIVING IN A “LAND OF LIMBO”

The fourth stage is the arrival of the asylum-seeker in the first asylum country and living in the asylum camp. The initial reaction of most respondents upon their arrival in one of the asylum countries was a feeling of euphoria—either because they had successfully escaped Vietnam, or because they had survived a perilous journey. This is consistent with the variety of reactions exhibited by refugees upon arrival in safety that were identified by Baker (1983:6).

The emotions of asylum-seekers frequently varied considerably whilst they were living in the first asylum camp, with the initial feelings of elation often followed by more depressing emotions as they realised their precarious position living in limbo—halfway between heaven and hell. The asylum camp stage of Vietnamese refugee migration was equivalent to the “midway-to-nowhere” point in the refugee migration identified by Kunz (1973:133), who argued that at this point refugees suffered from a lack of initiative and feelings of helplessness. These impressions were evident in Vietnamese asylum-seekers interviewed during this research. They also had to endure extremely overcrowded conditions in unhealthy and dangerous camps, with few rights and an uncertain future, separated from family and friends. The difficulties that Vietnamese faced living in the asylum camps were numerous, and have been detailed by Bousquet (1987), Geiger (1994), Hitchcox (1990b), Kelly (1975), Knudsen (1983, 1990, 1992), Liu et al. (1979), Mayer-Rieckh (1993), McCallin (1993) and Redden (1995), and summarised in Chapter 6.

The primary function of asylum camps during the CPA-era was to act as screening stations to determine who were refugees and who were not. The screening created uncertainty about the future of asylum-seekers, and caused them considerable strain and made their stay in the camps a particularly anxious period. Asylum-seekers

7 The reactions noted by Baker (1983:6) were “exhilaration, depression, exhaustion, guilt and shame, fear of being returned, fury and omnipotence.”
were apprehensive about the screening procedures and whether they would be accepted as refugees, and were forever fearful of being returned to Vietnam.

It is acknowledged that a person’s psychological and social state is adversely influenced by the duration of confinement in an asylum camp—the longer a person remains in a camp the greater effect it has on them. Baker (1983:6) argued that “[t]here can be nothing quite as demoralising as to languish for years in a transit camp unable to return home and having no idea if and when it will be possible to go to another country”. Hitchcox (1990b:125), who found length of stay was one of the major reasons for raised stress levels and depression, supports this. Many Vietnamese felt isolated, neglected and unwanted as they waited in the asylum camp for their status to be decided. They became more demoralised as they watched fellow asylum-seekers granted refugee status, while they still waited for a decision.

The biggest cause of stress and depression was if an asylum-seeker was rejected for refugee status. A negative decision shattered all dreams of resettlement. Those rejected for refugee status were often dismayed at the decision, and could not understand why they had been rejected. In addition, they felt confused and angry that others, who they considered had weaker claims for refugee status, had been accepted. Rejected asylum-seekers had a month after the decision was made—during a period of depression and confusion—to lodge an appeal with the appeal body in the relevant country.

An asylum-seeker’s rejection for refugee status led to a prolonged stay in the asylum camp as they sought other avenues to obtain refugee status, such as appeals to the appropriate appellate bodies, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and sometimes even arranged marriages. Under the conditions of the CPA, the only option available to rejected asylum-seekers after these avenues were exhausted was repatriation to Vietnam. Both the Hong Kong and Philippines governments

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8 Rejected asylum-seekers in Hong Kong could marry a refugee after the negative decision was handed down and receive refugee status because of their spouse’s status. However, in the Philippines, if a person married a refugee after they were rejected then they did not receive the refugee status of their spouse.
attempted to forcibly repatriate small numbers of rejected asylum-seekers in 1996 (Binks, 1999b; Lau, 1996a; Vietnamese Boatpeople Stage Mass Breakout in HK, 1996). However, this action was condemned by human rights activists and asylum-seekers, resulting in the cessation of forced repatriations. Governments agreed that all subsequent repatriation would be voluntary. Asylum-seekers were enticed to volunteer to return by the offer of US$240 as a repatriation bonus—paid by the UNHCR to volunteers after they had returned to Vietnam.

Rejected asylum-seekers had to make a second migration decision—whether to repatriate or not. Many of those rejected were reluctant to return to Vietnam. Despite their rejection, they hopelessly clutched a dream that would somehow allow them to resettle to the West. As UNHCR official Robert Cooper (cited in Jacob, 1996:1) commented “people still feel the U.S. will come to their aid, or they feel they will be allowed to stay”. Even those who were more realistic about their lack of resettlement opportunities often still refused to repatriate. Repatriation was seen as an admission of failure and that their endeavours in escaping had been in vain. Many also thought that they would “lose face” with family and friends if they returned to Vietnam, and were no doubt afraid of retributions from the Vietnamese government—despite Vietnamese government guarantees.

Those who elected to remain in the asylum camps endured increasingly difficult conditions. They remained in the overcrowded conditions and watched helplessly as others obtained refugee status or returned to Vietnam. The situation of those who remained in the asylum camps deteriorated even further from 1994, when host governments began to reduce services provided in the asylum camps, aiming to make

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9 Asylum-seekers in Hong Kong and the Philippines conducted protests to object to the forced repatriation. See Binks (1999b), Lau (1996) and Vietnamese Boatpeople Stage Mass Breakout in HK (1996) for newspaper reports on these protests.

10 Some of the dreams were fuelled by actual events, such as a Bill introduced in the US House of Representatives in May 1995 that proposed re-examining those rejected for refugee status.
conditions in the camp even more unpleasant and thereby making repatriation a more favourable option.

There were various factors that influenced rejected asylum-seekers to return to Vietnam. Some were enticed by the financial incentive, others were asked to return by family in Vietnam, and perhaps increasingly from 1994, some found conditions in the camps had become intolerable. Those who elected to return would first have resigned themselves to the fact that they would not be resettled to the West or be permitted to remain in the first asylum country. There would have been a realisation that repatriation was their only path to return to a “normal life”.

**REFUGEE STATUS AND REFUGEE CAMPS**

Obtaining refugee status was a momentous occasion for Vietnamese asylum-seekers. It guaranteed that the individual would not be returned to Vietnam and opened the gateway to resettlement. The burden of establishing refugee status was replaced by a more positive attitude, reflecting their closer step to resettlement. Some respondents claimed that behaviour of persons in the refugee camp was better than in the asylum camps, as they did not want to harm their chances of resettlement with a bad record. Refugees could finally focus on their future in another country.

Accompanying the change in status was a move out of the horrific asylum camps into somewhat more pleasant refugee camps—such as the Regional Refugee Transit Center (RRTC) in the Philippines. Refugees were frequently assisted in adapting to the refugee camps by friends they had previously known from the asylum camps.

The euphoria of obtaining refugee status continued during the early period of living in the refugee camp. Unfortunately, however, this elation sometimes weakened upon the realisation of the difficulties involved in being accepted for resettlement. The

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11 Theoretically, the granting of refugee status did guarantee resettlement to a third country. However, there are a small proportion of cases, mainly in Hong Kong, where refugees have experienced difficulty in being accepted for resettlement by a third country, due to health problems, criminal record, etc.
majority of refugees probably wished to resettle to the United States of America, but this proved extremely difficult for all applicants and impossible for most who applied. Refugees had no voice in submitting their name for interview by a visiting delegation from one of the resettlement countries. Instead, the UNHCR Resettlement Officer nominated them for interviews, with the primary criteria being whether there were any family ties to any particular country. It is this involuntary choice of a resettlement country that Dorais, Pilon-Lê and Nguyen (1987:105) claimed distinguishes refugees from ordinary migrants.

Detainment in the refugee camp was a period of waiting: waiting to be interviewed, waiting for the interview results, waiting for health clearance and then waiting notice of departure and resettlement. The refugee camp experience could be a relatively tranquil period if all conditions were favourable and applicants were quickly accepted for resettlement. For others less fortunate, it could be a roller-coaster ride of emotional highs and lows as they struggled to be accepted by a resettlement country.

Resettlement interviews conducted at the RRTC by officials from the Australian Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs (DIEA) were the quickest and least distressing of any resettlement country. Officials interviewed resettlement applicants for about five minutes, and were primarily concerned with whether the applicant wanted to resettle to Australia, and if so, whether they needed sponsorship assistance. At the other end of the spectrum, the most distressing experiences were a series of two or three interviews conducted by officials of the Joint Voluntary Agencies (JVA) on behalf of the U.S. government. These interviews were a de facto second screening, with applicants required once again to establish their refugee status. Consequently, these interviews were a major source of stress among those refugees applying to the United States of America. Canada—the third of the major resettlement countries—implemented more stringent interviews than Australia, but less rigorous than the United States.
The lenient selection policy carried out at the RRTC by the Australian government in 1994 was the result of various factors. Australian officials had faith in the screening procedures conducted by the Hong Kong and the Philippines immigration departments, and that the persons granted refugee status were truly refugees. Therefore there was no requirement to conduct a second *de facto* screening interview with applicants. In addition, DIEA’s refugee quota for the region at that time was not being met, which lessened the necessity to be selective. The Australian refugee resettlement program was based primarily on the health status of the refugee and not humanitarian factors. It was willing to accept “healthy” refugees, but less likely to accept those with medical conditions that could be a drain on the public health purse. Australian officials wanted to ensure that their resettlement obligations under the CPA had been met, so that they would not be obliged to accept the “basket-cases” remaining at the end. In fact, if Australia exceeded its obligations then it could pressure other countries to accept those who were left.

The immediate acceptance of refugees for resettlement to Australia was a joyful moment for the refugee applicants and they happily told everyone they met after they left the UNHCR building that they had been accepted by Australia. The acceptance gave refugees definite direction in their lives—they finally knew which country they would live in. However, the acceptance by the Australian government was conditional upon the refugees passing a medical examination. This was frequently a major obstacle in their quick resettlement. Refugees generally considered that while Australia had the easiest interviews, they had the most stringent medical examinations.

The period following the medical examinations was an anxious time for refugees, as they waited eagerly for their departure to be announced. Refugees would rush to the bulletin boards whenever departure lists were posted for their particular resettlement country. There was no relief to the waiting.

The fear of medical, social and psychological examinations identified by Baker (1983:6) was particularly apparent at RRTC. Refugees were hesitant to seek
professional help for fear it would affect resettlement chances. An adverse medical or mental complaint could delay or even block resettlement to a particular country. Consequently, those refugees in the greatest need often went without professional assistance. This reluctance to seek professional assistance may continue in the resettlement countries.

The processing system was not foolproof and problems frequently occurred. There were numerous cases where a respondent’s case was not processed correctly and had become “jammed”, with neither the refugee nor the Australian government aware of the delay. These inexplicable obstructions further delayed resettlement. The length of stay in the refugee camp increased the likelihood that a refugee would become depressed. They felt helpless, waiting for a faceless official overseas to approve their application. People generally found it difficult to comprehend how those who arrived in the camp after them, were interviewed by the same government after them, could be resettled before them. What intensified the problem was the lack of any communication channel to Australian government officials in Manila who they could question about their case, and the lack of feedback to inform applicants of their situation and to dismiss their fears.

Medical examinations sometimes revealed refugees suffered from a medical complaint, physical handicap or a mental health problem. The most common problem was tuberculosis and those affected were required to undertake a six-month course of treatment before they could resettle. The treatment considerably extended a person’s—and their family members—stay in the camp. In some cases the medical condition was deemed by the Australian government as so severe that the person was rejected for resettlement on health grounds.

The rejection of refugees for resettlement by Western countries frequently led to depression and sometimes even suicide attempts, because another path out of the camp was closed to them. In addition, it meant that UNHCR would have to submit their names to another resettlement country, and they would have to go through the lengthy
selection process once again, causing them to stay in the camp much longer. The refugees felt—quite understandably—that they were unwanted and had difficulty seeing a future for themselves. Fortunately, all persons granted refugee status were guaranteed resettlement, but finding a country that would accept some refugees proved difficult. Approximately one thousand Vietnamese refugees are still waiting to be accepted for resettlement by one of the Western nations. Their quest for resettlement will take longer and probably see them resettle in a country that was not one of their preferred options.

**RESETTLEMENT**

The arrival of refugees in countries such as Australia, Canada and the United States signified the beginning of a new, and final, stage in the refugee experience—resettlement. Resettlement is considered by many authors, including Tyhurst (1951), Cox (1977), Sluzki (1979), Hitch (1983) and Beiser (1990), to be composed of a number of phases (see Chapter 8) and could last longer than all the preceding stages. However, time and financial restraints, together with the research design, meant that not all the resettlement phases were investigated as part of this research. Instead, investigation was confined to the first twelve months of resettlement.

It was evident that the resettlement experiences of the refugees varied considerably during this initial period, depending upon variables such as age, family (and friends) already living in the city of settlement, English language ability, type of sponsorship, personal skills, and access to settlement services. Individual’s reactions are more varied in this final stage than at any other stage of the refugee experience. Other non-personal factors, such as economy of the resettlement country, also influence the settlement experiences.

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12 There were 990 Vietnamese refugees waiting for resettlement from Hong Kong in mid-1999 (Hong Kong Government, 1999). See Footnote 16, Chapter 6.
Emotions upon resettlement were generally quite buoyant. However, some refugees were more joyful than others, as they reunited with family members. The experiences of respondents correspond with Beiser's (1990:426) initial period of euphoria, which was relatively short-lived, lasting between two and six months before the next phase began.

Whitham (1983:52) stated that refugees often suffered from primary cultural shock during the early phases of resettlement, which caused many problems. Resettlement marked a distinct separation from family and friends—in Vietnam, in the refugee camp, and in other resettlement countries—and there could be a sudden realisation that they may never see each other again. The arrival of a refugee in a new environment, where cultural customs and values are widely different from Vietnam, could also trigger feelings of isolation, homesickness and depression. Other problems that can arise during this phase include difficulty learning the language and cultural customs, problems finding employment, family conflict and confrontations. Many refugees also came to realise that conditions in the resettlement country were more difficult than those originally perceived from the refugee camp. Vietnamese refugees in Australia—and other resettlement countries—were a distinct minority, and for the first time in many years, they were not the centre of attraction. In addition, they were no longer living in the protected and isolated atmosphere of the refugee camps. Refugees frequently became discontented as these realisations and problems arose. This was the disillusionment period that Beiser (1990:426) claimed could last between six months and two years. It was not always possible to determine whether refugees have moved into—or through—this phase from the brief interviews conducted in Australia, as many respondents were unwilling to be critical of conditions in their new country. However, a

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13 All activities in both the asylum camps and the refugee camps were centred on the Vietnamese. To them, it appeared as the world focussed on them. However, after resettlement they were no longer the focus of attention.
small number of respondents unintentionally indicated that they had entered this second phase.

It is quite possible that some respondents had passed through, or even by-passed, the disillusionment phase and had entered Beiser’s (1983) third—beginning resolution—phase. Most notable among the respondents was Bay, whose excellent English comprehension and family support had enabled him to obtain satisfactory employment and housing. He had become economically independent, and appeared to have adjusted well to his new life. He was not resentful about the limited opportunities available to him in Australia, but rather was appreciative of what had been available and had a very positive attitude about his—and his family’s—future.

FURTHER RESEARCH

There remain a number of areas of the refugee experience that require further investigation, so that we may obtain a better understanding of that experience. Although this thesis has provided an introduction into the first twelve months of resettlement, it lacks any additional contribution to understanding the later phases of resettlement. It would be very beneficial for studies to investigate the phases of refugee resettlement identified by Beiser (1990) in Australia—and other countries—for specific refugee populations.

One of the most pressing areas for on-going research and evaluation is the settlement needs of refugees. In particular, Australian authorities must determine whether the current services provided to refugees are adequate, and if not, what additional services should be implemented? It is time that the Community Refugee Settlement Scheme (CRSS) was evaluated again to examine how effective it is as a sponsorship program. In particular, it would be extremely beneficial to compare the

14 MSJ Keys Young Planners Pty. Ltd. conducted an evaluation of the CRSS in 1981.
resettlement experiences and needs of privately-sponsored refugees with those of community-sponsored (CRSS) refugees. This research found that some of the community-sponsored refugees received only basic levels of support, while others received considerably more than some family-sponsored refugees. Interviews with Vietnamese community leaders revealed that resources available to these schemes were declining and some organizations were struggling to provide refugees with sufficient provisions, such as bedding and clothes. The Federal government must revise what the minimal levels of support provided to refugees should be and determine whether current sponsorship arrangements are meeting these levels. If not, new or alternative arrangements should be implemented to fill the current voids in service provision.

There is an urgent need for additional Federal funding for the CRSS and associated support groups so that they may give appropriate services to refugees upon arrival, as well as follow-up assistance.

The Vietnamese community in Sydney has recognised some particular problems with the resettlement of refugees from northern Vietnam. Hien (1994:1) argued that the Vietnamese community has never “systematically identified and addressed” the settlement needs of the northern Vietnamese people. Consequently, he argued, the implications of this failure are that people from northern Vietnam “continue to be a severely disadvantaged or even at risk group in the Australian multicultural society”. He added that they “continue to live in social and community isolation” because they do not currently participate in community activities—either in the Vietnamese or in the general community—nor do they have any representation in the provision of service planning and delivery.

It was noteworthy that three of the four respondents who lived in the Western suburbs of Melbourne were northern Vietnamese. This could indicate that there are different settlement patterns for northerners compared with southerners. A comparison of these settlement patterns would be an area worthy of further research that would greatly assist service providers.
One component of the Vietnamese refugee migration that could not be investigated in this research, but would be beneficial to the greater understanding of the refugee experience, was the repatriation of rejected asylum-seekers to Vietnam. The need for research on this aspect of the migration experience has been recognised by Hitchcox (1990b) and Le (1990), but relatively few publications on this controversial topic have appeared. In particular, it would be helpful to know how those who returned to Vietnam—both voluntarily and involuntarily—have coped since their return, whether they have been subjected to any discrimination by the Vietnamese government, officials or other citizens since their return, how they used their “repatriation bonus”, what difference the payment made to their lives, whether their escape and incarceration in “limbo” (the first asylum camp/detention centre) was worthwhile and whether they would do it all again?

It would be beneficial to compare the migration of Vietnamese refugees undertaken in this research with other refugee movements, so that the similarities and differences can be identified. The stages of refugee migration approach adopted for this research is an ideal vehicle to undertake such research and it is hoped that other researchers may adopt it.

**PROCESSING AND POLICY ISSUES**

This research has also identified a number of issues concerning the processing of asylum-seekers and refugees that need to be brought into the public arena. Problems were evident with the management of Vietnamese refugees throughout the asylum camp and refugee camp stages. For example, conditions in the asylum camps were deplorable and hardly fit for human habitation. It was obvious that asylum governments did not

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15 Kessler (1993) and Refugees International (1994) wrote brief articles on refugee reintegration in Vietnam. It is understood that the UNHCR has undertaken some research on repatriated persons in Vietnam, but details have not been disclosed. The Vietnamese government is apparently reluctant to allow research on repatriation.
want to make conditions in the camp too comfortable, as this may have further enticed
Vietnamese to leave their homeland. It is possible that governments thought that poor
conditions in the camps might deter some Vietnamese taking flight.

The implementation of the CPA has been criticised from many quarters. The
determination procedures were flawed by using immigration officers with a lack of
understanding of the conditions in Vietnam and insufficient knowledge of international
law and human rights.

Numerous claims of corruption were levelled against government and other
officials working in the asylum and refugee camps. The extent of the corruption is not
known. Unfortunately, governments and international organizations were unwilling to
investigate the allegations directed against their employees and allowed the alleged
corruption to continue.

A number of problems were identified during field work with the processing of
Vietnamese refugees by the Australian government. Problems within the Australian
processing system, together with the lack of communication, caused many refugees at
the RRTC who applied for resettlement to Australia to suffer needlessly and spend
longer in the camp than was necessary. There were obviously no inherent checks in
place to ensure that all refugees were processed as quickly as possible.

Refugees at RRTC would have benefited enormously from a greater presence of
Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs officials (from the Australian Embassy in
Manila) at the refugee camp. For example, an Embassy office in the camp, even if
attended only part-time, would have provided an avenue of inquiry for the refugees,
rather than let them be totally isolated from the Embassy for months on end, as was the
case. In addition, it would have allowed officials to interview and process refugee
applicants in smaller numbers, rather than the large number that were interviewed every
three months or so. On-going resettlement interviews—rather than quarterly—would
have reduced the time that refugees had to wait for an Australian Embassy delegation to
visit the camp. Furthermore, on-going refugees may have distributed the workload more
evenly rather than allowing it to build-up along the processing line, both in asylum countries and in Australia.\textsuperscript{16} Lastly, Australian immigration officials in the camp could have educated officials in the camp about the requirements for refugee resettlement to Australia.

The Australian government should commit more resources to educating refugees while they are in the camps. Although some Australian volunteers provided orientation classes during some of the field work period, these were conducted without structure or resources, and were a poor attempt in comparison to those conducted by Canada and the United States of America. The refugee camp environment is an ideal place in which to provide English language and comprehensive cultural orientation to refugees before resettlement. Refugees have sufficient time in the camp to devote to such endeavours, whereas there are competing pressures that make it more difficult to attend education classes after they resettle to Australia. Extensive orientation classes would equip refugees with necessary skills before they arrived in Australia, rather than merely hoping they acquire them after resettlement. This would also reduce the pressure on sponsors to educate the refugees. Classes could also be directed at specific groups of the refugee population, such as the elderly and married women, who frequently have difficulties acquiring skills after resettlement.

The Australian government is condemned for implementing a selection policy in which economic considerations over-ride humanitarian concerns. The primary resettlement selection criterion was whether refugees passed the health examination, with Australia only wanting to accept those refugees without physical or mental conditions. The underlying reason behind this was that the Australian government did not want to resettle refugees who might be a cost to the health system. Although Government policy changed in 1994—and they became more willing to accept refugees

\textsuperscript{16} For example, an on-going interview and processing system might have meant that between ten and twenty cases were processed every week, rather than 100 or more every three months. This would mean that the Embassy and the Migrant Medical Clearance Unit had a more evenly distributed workload, rather than allowing it to build up.
with minor physical and mental conditions—there was still a ceiling on how much they would allow a refugee’s illness or health condition to cost the health system before they were rejected. Refugees with serious conditions that could incur considerable health costs were still refused. If refugee resettlement is to be a truly humanitarian program it needs to select persons on their need or deservedness and not on whether the person is going to incur a financial cost to the government because of their poor health.

A major concern for refugees was the time that it took to gain health clearance. In many instances refugees were delayed because of problems in the processing of the health examination and not the examination results. The distance between the Philippines and Australia—where the examinations were processed—and the lack of communication channels, amplified the problem for refugees. The temporary resettlement of 4,000 Kosova refugees to Australia in early 1999, and approximately 2,000 East Timorese refugees later in the year, has shown some inconsistencies in the treatment of refugees. Both these refugee groups were allowed to enter Australia without a health check—which was conducted after their arrival. The Migrant Medical Clearance Unit was able to process the medical examinations of the Kosova refugees in a very short time. This is quite a contrast with the difficulties encountered by numerous Vietnamese in their medical examinations and the time it took to get their results.

An alternative arrangement for the health examination could have been implemented. Rather than refugees undergoing a medical examination after they were interviewed by the resettlement country, all refugees could have undergone a comprehensive medical examination, conducted by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), upon arrival at the refugee camp. The results of the examination could then be made available to Embassy officials at the time of resettlement interview.

17 It is presumed that because the Kosova and East Timorese refugees were only granted temporary visas to Australia, they would not present long-term health problems, and thus would not be a prolonged burden on the Australian health system.
This would allow a decision regarding resettlement to be made at the time of interview, rather than having to wait months for examination results to be forwarded, a decision made in another country, and the decision be relayed back to the refugee camp. It would allow refugees to be rejected immediately, and permit them to apply to other countries much sooner. They would not have to undergo new health examinations for subsequent resettlement applications, which would probably reduce the amount of time they spent in the camp and the stress incurred.

Some of the medical problems suffered by refugees should have been treated before refugees were interviewed by the Australian government and the subsequent health examination. For example, as previously mentioned, one of the most common health problems among Vietnamese was tuberculosis. This was often only identified in the refugee camp after the resettlement health examinations. However, it could have been identified—and treated—in the asylum camps. The international community was apparently reluctant to treat all Vietnamese in the asylum camp and was preoccupied with persons who had received refugee status. The early identification and treatments of such illnesses would make the camp environments less of a health hazard, allowed refugees to move to the refugee camps in a better medical state and also improve the medical condition of those who eventually returned to Vietnam.

**SUMMARY**

This thesis has identified the stages of Vietnamese refugee migration since the introduction of the Comprehensive Plan of Action in 1989. The five-stage model that was developed incorporates elements from previous refugee models, other refugee research, and most importantly, from primary field work investigations in the Philippines, Hong Kong and Australia to provide a far greater understanding of the refugee experience.
Many of the deficiencies previously identified in the research conducted on refugee migrations have been addressed in this research. Importantly, this study presents a holistic perspective of the refugee experience. It details each of the stages of the Vietnamese refugee experience: from why and how persons fled Vietnam, to the conditions in the first asylum camps, the refugee determination procedures, the refugee camps (the Regional Refugee Transit Centre) in the Philippines and the applications for resettlement to Australia, and eventually the early resettlement stage in Australia. In addition, it also examines the passage of Vietnamese through these various stages, and identifies the "gatekeepers"—officials and organizations—who controlled the progress of refugees from one stage to the next.

This new model has some applications to other contemporary refugee migrations. It is interesting to compare the recent influx of some 1,000 Afghan, Iranian and Iraqi "boat people" into Australia in late 1999 and early 2000\(^\text{18}\) with the exodus of Vietnamese asylum-seekers between 1989 and 1996. The stages approach may be extremely beneficial in understanding the experiences of these latest asylum-seekers. Unfortunately, there is little information available about this current migration stream, so that it is not possible to examine the early stages prior to their arrival in Australia. However, the first three stages of this model would be applicable for virtually any refugee migration. The detention of Afghan, Iranian and Iraqi asylum-seekers in remote Australian detention centres has some strong similarities with the experiences of the Vietnamese in first asylum camps and detention centres. In both situations, asylum-seekers were detained in centres and subjected to screening procedures to determine whether they fulfilled refugee criteria under international law.\(^\text{19}\) Those rejected as

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\(^{18}\) The asylum-seekers pay for their passage to Australia aboard Indonesian fishing vessels, which offload them on Australian territory—such as Ashmore Reef, or the north-western mainland—or are intercepted by Australian naval or customs boats.

\(^{19}\) Asylum-seekers have generally been housed at the Port Hedland Immigration Reception and Processing Centre. However, this facility could not cope with the sudden influx of asylum-seekers in
refugees are repatriated to their home country, while those accepted are allowed to settle in a Western country: Australia. The major difference is that there is no refugee camp stage for those who are granted refugee status in Australia. If they obtain refugee status they will be allowed to settle immediately in the wider Australian community.

It is expected that this new model will become increasingly important for describing future refugee migrations, as it becomes more difficult to solve involuntary population displacements. Many countries have already shown their reluctance to accept refugees for settlement. For example, South East and East Asian countries were unwilling to accept Vietnamese refugees for settlement and shifted the onus onto the developed countries. It is unlikely that the position of these countries will weaken in the future. In fact, it is more likely that countries in the less-developed world will strengthen their position and more countries will adopt this approach, making it even more difficult to find durable solutions to refugee migrations.

This study identifies many of the problems inherent in refugee migrations, especially where refugee determination procedures are introduced to separate economic migrants from refugees. Service providers, policy makers, and other individuals and organizations concerned with refugee populations will be able to use this research to predict some of the problems associated with refugees and hopefully pre-empt them, thereby making the refugee migration a more acceptable experience—both in first asylum and resettlement countries.

Refugee migrations have become more frequent and more problematic over the last fifty years, and commentators such as Kaplan and Brzezinski (cited in UNHCR, 1995:233) predict that they may even intensify in the future. Research on refugee populations therefore must be ready to explain different refugee experiences and problems that will arise. It is hoped that the additional insights into refugee migration...
gained from this research will assist in understanding current and future refugee movements and improve the refugee experience for those displaced.
# APPENDIX 1

## ETHNIC ORIGINS OF ARRIVALS TO HONG KONG: 1979-1997

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Chinese from</th>
<th>Vietnamese from</th>
<th>Others from</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>South Vietnam</td>
<td>North Vietnam</td>
<td>South Vietnam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>17,972</td>
<td>37,536</td>
<td>9,825</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(%)</td>
<td>(26.1)</td>
<td>(54.6)</td>
<td>(14.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>5,599</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(%)</td>
<td>(0.9)</td>
<td>(0.6)</td>
<td>(82.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>6,050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(%)</td>
<td>(1.0)</td>
<td>(0.7)</td>
<td>(71.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>6,051</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(%)</td>
<td>(1.2)</td>
<td>(0.3)</td>
<td>(77.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1,904</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(%)</td>
<td>(1.3)</td>
<td>(0.3)</td>
<td>(52.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1,563</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(%)</td>
<td>(2.2)</td>
<td>(0.9)</td>
<td>(70.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>687</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(%)</td>
<td>(1.2)</td>
<td>(0.9)</td>
<td>(61.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>914</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(%)</td>
<td>(2.4)</td>
<td>(1.2)</td>
<td>(44.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(%)</td>
<td>(0.4)</td>
<td>(0.7)</td>
<td>(29.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>5,012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(%)</td>
<td>(0.4)</td>
<td>(0.9)</td>
<td>(27.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>1,717</td>
<td>486</td>
<td>3,032</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(%)</td>
<td>(5.0)</td>
<td>(1.4)</td>
<td>(8.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>4,256</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>1,861</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(%)</td>
<td>(64.5)</td>
<td>(4.5)</td>
<td>(28.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>2,319</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>8,586</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(%)</td>
<td>(11.5)</td>
<td>(1.1)</td>
<td>(42.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(%)</td>
<td>(75.0)</td>
<td>(0.0)</td>
<td>(8.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(%)</td>
<td>(0.0)</td>
<td>(4.0)</td>
<td>(96.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(%)</td>
<td>(0.3)</td>
<td>(0.0)</td>
<td>(38.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(%)</td>
<td>(0.8)</td>
<td>(9.5)</td>
<td>(94.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(%)</td>
<td>(0.8)</td>
<td>(99.2)</td>
<td>(99.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(%)</td>
<td>(1.0)</td>
<td>(99.0)</td>
<td>(99.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>26,768</td>
<td>38,929</td>
<td>52,266</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(14.4)</td>
<td>(20.9)</td>
<td>(28.0)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Hong Kong Government, 1997c.
APPENDIX 2

DECLARATION AND COMPREHENSIVE PLAN OF ACTION

I. Declaration

The Governments of the States represented in the International Conference on Indo-Chinese Refugees, held at Geneva from 13 to 14 June 1989,

Having reviewed the problems of Indo-Chinese asylum-seekers in the South-East Asian region,

Noting that, since 1975, over 2 million persons have left their countries of origin in Indo-China and that the flow of asylum-seekers still continues,

Aware that the movement of asylum-seekers across frontiers in the South-East Asian region remains a subject of intense humanitarian concern to the international community,

Recalling United Nations General Assembly resolution 3455 (XXX) and the first Meeting on Refugees and Displaced Persons in South-East Asia convened at Geneva in July 1979 under the auspices of the United Nations to address the problem,

Recalling further the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, and related instruments,

Noting with satisfaction that, as a result of combined efforts on the part of Governments and international organizations concerned, a durable solution has been found for over 1.6 million Indo Chinese,

Preoccupied however by the burden imposed, particularly on the neighbouring countries and territories, as a result of the continuation of the outflow and the presence of large numbers of asylum seekers still in camps,

Alarmed by indications that the current arrangements designed to find solutions for asylum-seekers and resolve problems stemming from the outflow may no longer be responsive to the size, tenacity and complexity of the problems in the region,

Recognizing that the resolution of the problem of asylum seekers in the region could contribute positively to a climate of peace, harmony and good neighbourliness,

Satisfied that the international community, and in particular the countries directly involved, have responded positively to the call for a new international conference made by the States members of the Association of South-East Asian Nations and endorsed by the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees at its thirty-ninth session and by the General Assembly of the United Nations at its forty-third session,

Noting the progress achieved towards a solution of this issue by the various bilateral and multilateral meeting held between the parties concerned prior to the International Conference on Indo-Chinese Refugees,
Noting that the issues arising from the presence of Khmer refugees and displaced persons are being discussed, among the parties directly involved, within a different framework and as such have not been included in the deliberations of the Conference.

Noting with satisfaction the positive results of the Preparatory Meeting for the Conference, held in Kuala Lumpur from 7 to 9 March 1989,

Realizing that the complex problem at hand necessitates the cooperation and understanding of all concerned and that a comprehensive set of mutually re-enforcing humanitarian undertakings, which must be carried out in its totality rather than selectively, is the only realistic approach towards achieving a durable solution to the problem,

Acknowledging that such a solution must be developed in context of national laws and regulations as well as of international standards,

Have solemnly resolved to adopt the attached Comprehensive Plan of Action.

II. Comprehensive Plan of Action

A. Clandestine departures

1. Extreme human suffering and hardship, often resulting in loss lives, have accompanied organized clandestine departures. It is therefore imperative that humane measures be implemented to deter such departures, which should include the following:
   (a) Continuation of official measures directed against those organizing clandestine departures, including clear guidelines on these measures from the central government to the provincial and local authorities.
   (b) Mass media activities at both local and international level, focusing on:
      (i) The dangers and hardship involved in clandestine departures;
      (ii) The institution of a status-determination mechanism under which those determined not to be refugees shall have no opportunity for resettlement;
      (iii) Absence of any advantage, real or perceived, particularly in relation to third-country resettlement, of clandestine and unsafe departures;
      (iv) Encouragement of the use of the regular departure and other migration programmes;
      (v) Discouragement of activities leading to clandestine departures.
   (c) In the spirit of mutual cooperation, the countries concerned shall consult regularly to ensure effective implementation and coordination of the above measures.

B. Regular departure programmes

2. In order to offer a preferable alternative to clandestine departures, emigration from Viet-Nam through regular departure procedures and migration programmes, such as the current Orderly Departure Programme, should be fully encouraged and promoted.

3. Emigration through regular departure procedures and migration programmes should be accelerated and expanded with a view to making such programmes the primary and eventually the sole modes of departure.

4. In order to achieve this goal, the following measures will undertaken:
   (a) There will be a continuous and widely publicized media campaign to increase awareness of regular departure procedures and migration programmes for departure from Viet-Nam.
   (b) All persons eligible under regular third-country migration programmes, Amerasians and former re-education centre detainees will have full access to regular departure procedures and
migration programmes. The problem of former re-education centre detainees will be further discussed separately by the parties concerned.

(c) Exit permits and other resettlement requirements facilitated for all persons eligible under regular departure plans and migration programmes.

(d) Viet-Nam will fully co-operate with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Intergovernmental Committee for Migration (ICM) in expediting and improving processing, including medical processing, for departures under regular departure procedures and migration programmes and will ensure that medical records of those departing comply with standards acceptable to receiving countries.

(e) Viet-Nam, UNHCR, ICM and resettlement countries will cooperate to ensure that air transportation and logistics are sufficient to move expeditiously all those accepted under regular departure procedures and migration programmes.

(f) If necessary, countries in South-East Asia through which people emigrating under regular departure procedures and migration programmes must transit will, with external financial support as appropriate, expand transit facilities and expedite exit and entry procedures in order to help facilitate increased departures under such programmes.

C. Reception of new arrivals

5. All those seeking asylum will be given the opportunity to do so through the implementation of the following measures:

(a) Temporary refuge will be given to all asylum-seekers, who will be treated identically regardless of their mode of arrival until the status-determination process is completed.

(b) UNHCR will be given full and early access to new arrivals and will retain access, following the determination of their status.

(c) New arrivals will be transferred, as soon as possible, to asylum centres where they would be provided assistance and full access to the refugee status determination process.

D. Refugee status

6. The early establishment of a consistent region-wide refugee status determination process is required and will take place in accordance with national legislation and internationally accepted practice. It will make specific provision, inter alia, for the following:

(a) Within a prescribed period, the status of the asylum-seeker will be determined by a qualified and competent national authority or body, in accordance with established refugee criteria and procedures. UNHCR will participate in the process in an observer and advisory capacity. In the course of that period, UNHCR shall advise in writing each individual of the nature of the procedure, of the implications for rejected cases and of the right to appeal the first-level determination.

(b) The criteria will be those recognized in the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, bearing in mind, to the extent appropriate, the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other relevant international instruments concerning refugees, and will be applied in a humanitarian spirit taking into account the special situation of the asylum-seekers concerned and the need to respect the family unit. A uniform questionnaire developed in consultation with UNHCR will be the basis for interviews and shall reflect the elements of such criteria.

(c) The Handbook on Procedures and Criteria for Determining Refugee Status issued by UNHCR will serve as an authoritative and interpretative guide in developing and applying the criteria.

(d) The procedures to be followed will be in accordance with those endorsed by the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in this area. Such procedures will include, inter alia:
(i) The provision of information to the asylum-seekers about the procedures, the
criteria and the presentation of their cases;
(ii) Prompt advice of the decision in writing within a prescribed period;
(iii) A right of appeal against negative decisions and proper appeals procedures for this
purpose, based upon the existing laws and procedures of the individual place of
asylum, with the asylum seeker entitled to advice, if required, to be provided under
UNHCR auspices.

7. UNHCR will institute, in co-operation with the Government concerned, a comprehensive
regional training programme for officials involved in the determination process with a view to
ensuring the proper and consistent functioning of the procedures and application of the criteria,
taking full advantage of the experience gained in Hong Kong.

E. Resettlement

8. Continued resettlement of Vietnamese refugees benefiting from temporary refuge in South-
East Asia is a vital component of the Comprehensive Plan of Action

1. Long-Stayers Resettlement Programme

9. The Long-Stayers Resettlement Programme includes all individuals who arrived in
temporary asylum camps prior to the appropriate cut-off date and would contain the following
elements:
(a) A call to the international community to respond to the need for resettlement, in particular
through the participation by an expanded number countries, beyond those few currently active
in refugee resettlement. The expanded number of countries could include among others, the
following: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Germany, Federal Republic of,
Finland, France, Ireland, Japan, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden,
Switzerland, United Kingdom and United States of America.
(b) A multi-year commitment to resettle all the Vietnamese who have arrived in temporary
asylum camps prior to an agreed date, except those persons already found not to be refugees
under established status determination procedure and who express the wish to return to Viet-
Nam. Refugees will be advised that they do not have the option of refusing offers of
resettlement, as this would exclude them from further resettlement consideration.

2. Resettlement Programme for Newly-Determined Refugees

10. The Resettlement Programme for Newly-Determined Refugees will accommodate all those
who arrive after the introduction of status determination procedures and are determined to be
refugees. Within a designated period after their transfer to the resettlement area, those
determined to be refugees shall receive an orientation brief from a UNHCR representative that
explains the third-country resettlement programme, the length of time current arrivals may be
expected to spend in camp awaiting resettlement, and the necessity of adhering to the rules and
regulations of the camp.

11. Wherever possible, a pledge shall be sought from the resettlement countries to place all
those determined to be refugees, except those expressing the wish to return to Viet-Nam, within
a prescribed period. It shall be the responsibility of UNHCR, with the full support of all the
resettlement countries and countries of asylum, to coordinate efforts to ensure that departures
are effected within that time.
F. Repatriation/Plan of Repatriation

12. Persons determined not to be refugees should return to their country of origin in accordance with international practices reflecting the responsibilities of States towards their own citizens. In the first instance, every effort will be made to encourage the voluntary return of such persons.

13. In order to allow this process to develop momentum, the following measures will be implemented:
   (a) Widely publicized assurances by the country of origin that returnees will be allowed to return in conditions of safety and dignity and will not be subject to persecution.
   (b) The procedure for readmission will be such that the applicants would be readmitted within the shortest possible time.
   (c) Returns will be administered in accordance with the above principles by UNHCR and ICM, and internationally funded reintegration assistance will be channelled through UNHCR, according to the terms of the Memorandum of Understanding signed with Viet-Nam on 13 December 1988.

14. If, after the passage of reasonable time, it becomes clear that voluntary repatriation is not making sufficient progress towards the desired objective, alternatives recognized as being acceptable under international practices would be examined. A regional holding centre under the auspices of UNHCR may be considered as an interim measure for housing persons determined not to be refugees pending their eventual return to the country of origin.

15. Persons determined not to be refugees shall be provided humane care and assistance by UNHCR and international agencies pending their return to the country of origin. Such assistance would include educational and orientation programmes designed to encourage return and reduce re-integration problems.

G. Laotian asylum-seekers

16. In dealing with Laotian asylum-seekers, future measures are to be worked out through intensified trilateral negotiation between UNHCR, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Thailand, with the active support and co-operation of all parties concerned. These measures should be aimed at:
   (a) Maintaining safe arrival and access to the Lao screening process;
   (b) Accelerating and simplifying the process for both the return of the screened out and voluntary repatriation to the Lao People's Democratic Republic under safe, humane and UNHCR-monitored conditions.

17. Together with other durable solutions, third-country resettlement continues to play an important role with regard to the present camp populations of the Laotians.

H. Implementation and review procedures

18. Implementation of the Comprehensive Plan of Action is a dynamic process that will require continued co-ordination and possible adaptation to respond to changing situations. In order to ensure effective implementation of the Plan, the following mechanisms shall be established:
   (a) UNHCR, with the financial support of the donor community, will be in charge of continuing liaison and co-ordination with concerned Governments and intergovernmental as well as non-governmental organizations to implement the Comprehensive Plan of Action.
(b) A Steering Committee based in South-East Asia will be established. It will consist of representatives of all Governments making specific commitments under the Comprehensive Plan of Action. The Steering Committee will meet periodically under chairmanship of UNHCR to discuss implementation of the Comprehensive Plan of Action. The Steering Committee may establish sub-committees as necessary to deal with specific aspects of the implementation of the Plan, particularly with regard to status determination, return and resettlement.

(c) A regular review arrangement will be devised by UNHCR preferably in conjunction with the annual Executive Committee session, to assess progress in implementation of the Comprehensive Plan of Action and consider additional measures to improve the Plan's effectiveness in meeting its objectives.
APPENDIX 3

REEDUCATION CAMPS IN VIETNAM: 1975-1981

Provinces
1 An Giang
2 Bac Thai
3 Ben Tre
4 Binh Tri Thien
5 Cao Lang
6 Cui Long
7 Duc Lac
8 Dong Nai
9 Dong Thap
10 Gia Lai - Kontum
11 Ha Bac
12 Ha Nam Ninh
13 Ha Son Binh
14 Ha Tuyen
15 Hai Hung
16 Hai Phong
17 Hanoi
18 Hau Giang
19 Ho Chi Minh
20 Hoang Lien Son
21 Kien Giang
22 Lai Chau
23 Lam Dong
24 Long An
25 Minh Hai
26 Nghi Tinh
27 Nghe An
28 Phu Kham
29 Quang Nam - Da Nang
30 Quang Ninh
31 Son La
32 Song Be
33 Tay Ninh
34 Thai Binh
35 Thanh Hoa
36 Thua The
37 Tien Giang
38 Vinh Phu

0 100 200 km
1. **An Giang**  
   (includes former Chau Doc)  
   Cai Lang  
   Chau Doc  
   Chi lang  
   Long Xuyen  

2. **Bac Thai**  
   Thai Nguyen  
   Yen The  

3. **Ben Tre**  
   (formerly Kien Hoa)  
   Ben Tre  
   Bau Sen  
   Ben Gia  
   Con Ong  
   Phu Vinh  

4. **Binh Tri Thien**  
   (formerly Quang Binh, Quang Tri and Thua Thien)  
   Dong Hoi  
   Mui Ron  
   Hue  
   Khe Sanh  
   Lao Bao  
   Quang Tri  

5. **Cao Lang**  
   Cao Bang  
   Lang Son  

6. **Cuu Long**  
   (formerly Can Tho)  
   Bau An  
   Can Tho  
   Cau Binh Dong  
   Go Nhum  
   Long Tuyen  
   Nha Dai (Vinh Long)  
   Khanh Hung  
   Vinh Chau  
   Vinh Long  

7. **Dac Lac**  
   Ban Me Thuot  
   Duc Lap  

8. **Dong Nai**  
   (formerly Bien Hoa, Long Khanh, and Vung Tau)  
   Ba Ria  
   Bien Hoa  
   Gia Ray (Z-30)  
   Ho Nai  
   Long Giao  
   Long Thanh  
   Phuoc Le  
   Suoi Mau (Tan Hiep)  
   Trang Bom  
   Xuan Loc  
   Xuyen Moc  
   Trang Tao  

9. **Dong Thap**  
   (includes former Kien Phong)  
   Moc Hoa and others  

10. **Gai Lai-Kon Tum**  
   Kon Tum  
   Le Trung  
   Pleiku  

11. **Ha Bac**  
   No camps identifiable  

12. **Ha Nam Ninh**  
   (Formerly Nam Dinh, Ninh Binh and Ha Nam)  
   Nam Ha  
   Nam Dinh  
   Ninh Binh  
   Trai Song Me  

13. **Ha Son Binh**  
   Ba Vi  
   Hoa Binh  
   Ha Tay  

14. **Ha Tuyen**  
   Ha Giang  
   Nghia Lo  
   Quyet Tien  
   Tuyen Quang  
   Yen Bai  

15. **Hai Hung**  
   Hai Duong  

16. **Hai Phong (Hai Phong City)**  

17. **Hoa Lo Hai Phong**  

18. **Hanoi**  
   Hoa Lo  

19. **Hau Giang**  
   Bac Lieu (Vinh Loi)  
   Chau Thanh  
   Chuong Thien (D-18)  
   Quyet Thang  
   Thang Loi
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Dong Ban
Katum
Bo Tuc
Trang Lon
Cay Cay (A and B)
Suoi Nuoc Trong
Ben Keo

35. Thai Binh
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36. Thuan Hoa
   (Camp No 5)
   (formerly Ly Ba So)
   Thanh Phong
   Thanh Lam
   Vinh

37. Thuan Hai
   Binh Tuy
   Chan Chua
   Da Mai
   Ham Tan (Z-30D)
   Phan Rang
   Phan Thiet

38. Tien Giang
   Cai Be
   My Tho
   Vuon Dao

39. Vinh Phu
   Vinh Phu (Tan Lap)
   Vinh Quang (A and B)

Source: Nguyen, 1983
## APPENDIX 4

### SIZE AND PASSENGER NUMBERS OF REFUGEE BOATS

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<td>39</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 tonnes</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field study, 1994
APPENDIX 5

1994 VIETNAMESE REFUGEE SURVEY

Survey Number: ___-___ Date: ___/-/1994
Respondent: ________ Sex of Respondent: ________
Registration N°: RS/TC Billett Number: ________

PERSONAL DETAILS

Q. 1 How many people live in this billet?
Q. 2 How many persons in your case (family)?
Q. 3 How old are you?
Q. 4 What religion do you practice?
Q. 5 What is your marital status?
Q. 6 What ethnic group do you belong to?

INFORMATION ABOUT YOU IN VIETNAM

Q. 7 What was your occupation in Vietnam?
Q. 8 What was your monthly income?
Q. 9 Where did you live in Vietnam?
Q. 10 How long did you live there?
Q. 11 How many persons were in your family there?
Q. 12 When you were living in Vietnam, did you have any relatives living overseas?
If YES, who, in what country(ies) and did you have regular contact with them?

Q. 13 When you were living in Vietnam, what were the following conditions like;
Employment opportunities
Food availability
Education opportunities
Housing
Health facilities?

Q.14 When did you first think about escaping from Vietnam?

Q. 15 How many times did you attempt to escape from Vietnam?

Q. 16 Why did you decide to leave Vietnam?

Q. 17 Can you tell me how you organised your escape from Vietnam?

Q. 18 How did you know about the boat leaving?

Q. 19 How long did it take to organise the escape?

Q. 20 How much did it cost to escape?

Q. 21 Describe the events on the day you left Vietnam.

Q. 22 Where did you leave from?

Q. 23 What date did you leave Vietnam?

Q. 24 How many people escaped in your group?

Q. 25 Describe the boat you escaped in and conditions aboard the boat.

Q. 26 How many days were you aboard the boat?

Q. 27 Did you have any difficulties while you were aboard the boat?
If YES, please describe these difficulties.

Q. 28 Where did your journey end?

Q. 29 When did you arrive in the first asylum country?

Q. 30 Describe what happened when you arrived in the asylum country.
Q. 31 Describe your feelings when you arrived in the asylum country.

Q. 32 When you arrived in the asylum country, how long did you expect to live in a refugee camp before you would be resettled to another country?

REFUGEE STATUS DETERMINATION

Q. 33 Did you know about the screening process before you left Vietnam? If YES, what did you know?

Q. 34 What were told about the screening process when you arrived in the asylum country?

Q. 35 When did you have your pre-screening interview?

Q. 36 When were you interviewed by the Department of Immigration?

Q. 37 Was there an interpreter present?

Q. 38 Were there any problems during the screening interview? If YES, please describe the problems.

Q. 39 What was the result of your screening interview? (Were you accepted or rejected for refugee status?)

IF ACCEPTED, go to Q.46

Q. 40 If you were rejected, what were the grounds for not obtaining refugee status?

Q. 41 How long were you given to submit an appeal?

Q. 42 Were you assisted by anyone in the preparation of the appeal? If YES, who?

Q. 43 When did you submit your appeal?

Q. 44 What were the grounds for your appeal?

Q. 45 Were there any problems with your appeal? If YES, please describe.

Q. 46 When were you granted refugee status?

Q. 47 What are your thoughts on the refugee screening process?
CONDITIONS IN THE FIRST ASYLUM CAMP

Q. 48  What first asylum camp/detention centre did you live in for the longest period?

Q. 49  Please describe the following conditions in that camp.
       Camp security
       Camp regulations and discipline
       Housing
       Food rations
       Water supply
       Electricity supply
       Sanitation
       Health services
       Education facilities
       Vocational training
       Recreation facilities
       Postal services

Q. 50  Were the food rations sufficient, or did you have to purchase additional food?

Q. 51  What additional food and supplies did you purchase?

Q. 52  How much did you spend on additional food each week?

Q. 53  How much did you spend on other supplies each week?

Q. 54  Did you receive any monetary assistance from relatives living overseas?
       If YES, how much did you receive?

Q. 55  What was the best part about living in this camp?

Q. 56  What was the worst part about living in this camp?
Q. 57 When did you arrive at RRTC?

Q. 58 How does this camp compare to the previous camp(s) you lived in? Why?

Q. 59 Please describe the following facilities at RRTC:
- Camp security
- Camp regulations and discipline
- Housing
- Food ration
- Water supply
- Electricity supply
- Sanitation
- Health services
- Education facilities
- Skills training
- Recreation facilities
- Postal services

Q. 60 Are the food rations provided at RRTC sufficient, or do you purchase additional food?
   If INSUFFICIENT,
   How much do you spend on additional food each week?
   How much do you spend on other supplies each week?

Q. 61 Do you receive any monetary assistance from anyone living overseas?
   If YES,
   How much?
   How often?
   Who from?
   Where?

Q. 62 Do you work in any agency or neighbourhood council?
   If YES, where?

Q. 63 What is the best aspect of living in this camp?

Q. 64 What is the worst aspect about living in this camp?
RESETTLEMENT

Q. 65 Did you apply for resettlement to any countries other than Australia?  
If YES, what countries?

Q. 66 Why was your application to that country(ies) rejected?

Q. 67 Why did you apply for resettlement to Australia?

Q. 68 Do you have any relatives living in Australia?  
If YES,  
What city do they live in?  
What is the postcode?

Q. 69 In what Australian city do you plan to live?

Q. 70 Why will you go to that city?

Q. 71 When were you accepted by the Australian delegation?

Q. 72 When did you have your IOM health check?

Q. 73 What are your expectations about living in Australia? What do you think you will do?

Q. 74 What is the one thing that you are most looking forward to in Australia?

Q. 75 Do you think there are any bad aspects about living in Australia?

Q. 76 What will you do during the first year in Australia - (learn English, find a job, etc)?

CULTURAL ORIENTATION

Q. 77 Did you attend CO classes?  
If NO, why not?

Q. 78 If YES,  
How would you evaluate the course?  
How could the course be improved?  
Who was your teacher?  
How would you rate your teacher?
MISCELLANEOUS

Q. 79 Do you still have any relatives living in Vietnam?  
    If YES, who?

Q. 80 When you resettle in Australia, do you intend to sponsor any of these people to Australia?

Q. 81 Do you ever intend to return to visit Vietnam?

Q. 82 Would you ever return to live permanently in Vietnam?

Q. 83 If there had only been the possibility of you living in the first asylum country (the Philippines or Hong Kong), and not resettling to Australia or any other Western country, would you still have fled Vietnam?

Q. 84 You have been a refugee for many years, can you describe what it is like to be a refugee?

Q. 85 Since you left Vietnam, what has been your happiest moment?

Q. 86 Since you left Vietnam, what has been your sadest moment?

Note: I plan to conduct a follow-up survey of Vietnamese refugees in Australia next year. Would you allow me to interview you again in Australia next year?  
If YES,  
Do you have an address where I could contact you?

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ASSISTANCE.
APPENDIX 6

EVENTS OF THE CRISIS IN PFAC

EVENTS OF THE CRISIS IN PFAC

Feb. 02 '94

12 PM: The hunger strike, as a further step of the demonstration, was 2 days old, making the atmosphere of the camp much tenser. Col. , of the Wescom, required the leaders of the demonstration to disperse voluntarily and informed them of the forced disperse which would be used as a mandate.

4:00 PM: After meeting with the Wescom deputy, the leaders informed people of the order of the camp administrator to use force to disperse the mass.

7:30 PM: Meeting with the "steering committee" setup by the people itself, the leaders of the demonstration reached the last decision to maintain the struggle by a voting among 24 representatives, 16 of them voted in, 6 voted out and 2 with blank ballots.

10:00 PM: The leaders informed people of the result of the voting and declared to maintain the struggle.

12 PM: Around 300 people stayed vigil in front of UNHCR office.

Feb. 03 '94

3:30 AM: Three trucks filled with marines was stopped at the camp main gate. The demonstrators screamed out for help. Many of them run back to other zones to alarm people of the attack of the marine which was coming. Many people, in half sleeping state, run to the site and joined the crowd.

4:20 AM: The first truck darted to the site and poured out soldiers armed with shields, clubs and automatic rifles. Jumping out of the vehicle, they began to attack the demonstrators who were sitting at the front line. Seconds later, the two trucks parked in line and the new arrivals did the same thing. They beat whoever they saw—male or female, old or young—they tore any demonstration signs they encountered and carried away any one who fell down. Fortunately most of the wounded people was able to escape the arrest or was assisted by their mates to run back to the crowd. After 10 minutes of attacking, the soldiers ceased and collected all the materials of the demonstrator scattering all over the ground. Four serious wounded were hospitalized. The soldiers then made a barbedwire circle to isolate the demonstrators. At the same time they also prevented other people from supplying water and foods for the isolated people. One person who was in the choir of the church started to sing some holy songs to hail the virgin Mary, many people followed and they sang in tears.

8:00 AM: The Filipino soldiers tried to lure back the leaders by informing them that the camp administrator wanted to talk with them in the Wescom Headquarter. Their attempt was failed.

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Many physical conflicts happen between Vietnamese asylum seekers who stubbornly tried to bring water and food for the isolated people and the marines who determinedly use force as a tough measure to prevent the former. These conflicts resulted in the physical wounds for many Vietnamese asylum seekers, male and female. On the other hand, the attitudes of the Filipino soldier, using drinking water confiscated from the Vietnamese to wash their hand and face, smashing nylon bags of lemon and small bottles of water, were interpreted as provocation. This had accumulated the pent-up frustration of the demonstrators and all Vietnamese asylum seekers outside the isolated circle.

1:00 PM: The soldier changed the shift but maintained their tactic. One full and fresh platoon of marines took their turn to isolate the demonstrators. Like the attitude of the previous soldiers, the new arrivals continued to smash and destroy all means of supplies from Vietnamese asylum seekers. They also built more barbedwire barriers. They isolated people who had been starved and thirsty since early morning, become exhausted under a hot sun.

3:30 PM: Rev. Thich Thong Dat, because of his personal need to go home was arrested and escorted away to where no one knew.

4:00 PM: Filipino soldiers with the help of the fire department of the Airforce and under Capt. Dennis command, used the fire-hose to attack the mass gathering in front of the Catholic Church, most of them were women and children who, because of their starved and thirsty, worked their way through the barriers of the soldiers to bring food and water.

Many vulnerable people were beaten up in the witness of all people in the camp, and they were wounded in all levels. The serious wounded ones fell on their feet; a pregnant women with a young baby in arm was attacked by 2 soldiers at a time and fell unconscious, her shoulder filled with blood. A young and robust man whose wife was being isolated made his way thru some soldiers but found himself being trapped in the rain of clubs and instantly fell down like a wet towel on the ground. The screams of the wounded, the cries of beaten women and children fierce sounds of the furious people made the ground of front of the Catholic Church become hell on earth.

Being shocked by the cruelty of the soldiers, father Crawford broke the lock of the Church gate to make an exit for the people to seek asylum into the Church. action saved the neck of hundreds of vulnerable people.
From this strong hold, which was very near to the isolated demonstrators, people jumped over the fence of the Church and overrun the prohibited fence of barbed wire and Filipino soldiers. The situation was completely out of control of the military force and the soldiers began to withdraw out of the angry mass who might do unexpected thing to them.

6:00 PM: Thousands of people gathered at the demonstration site, showing their determination to the struggle. All had been starved because there was no food and water supply this day. The camp had been closed down since last night and people was informed that Filipino soldier would shoot at anyone who attempted to sneak out. For the whole day, nobody even journalists was allowed to get in or out of the camp.

One Filipino soldier left his arms on the ground and, out of sudden, he burst into tears and squatted down in front of CFSI Office while the others silently retreated to the food section of the camp where they collected together with shields and clubs out of hands. Their faces looked numb, their bodies perspirated.

10 PM: Soldiers fell in lines and dispersed. Some of them were assigned to watch at the main gate. The mass continued to dominate their site, waiting for the worse to come at night time. Many rumors said that tear gas and tougher measure would be used at night time so that no picture would be taken, or that military force along with the police of the Puerto Princesa City with new tactics, would put down all people within tonight. Rumors went on in many ways. No official information released.

Days later:

The situation, however, became normal as it was before. There was no more tougher measure or tear gas. There was no more threats of the camp authorities. VNese people just sat there, in front of UNHCR Office, as they had done for more than 2 months.

After the physical attack made by Filipino soldier to disperse the demonstrators, 15 VNese asylum seekers were brought to the hospital because they were beaten to unconsciousness, seven of them were women. The recovering patients were put under probation in former zone 9 and 10. But many of them were able to escape. The rest declared hunger strike to protest the illegal detention and as a result, they were beaten up by drunk Filipino soldiers who were supposed to watch them. And the fact that hundred of VNese asylum seekers who were wounded and beaten up has not been recorded and told.
Warning Notice

There is a new policy in force in Hong Kong.

Former residents of Vietnam seeking to enter Hong Kong as economic migrants are now treated as illegal immigrants.

You are free to leave Hong Kong. If you choose to continue your journey you will be given food and water and, if necessary, your boat will be repaired.

If you do not leave Hong Kong and are found to be an economic migrant you will be detained as an illegal migrant pending repatriation to Vietnam.

Source: Diller, 1988: Appendix C.
**APPENDIX 8**

**HONG KONG DETENTION CENTRES, 1991**

**LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

**Government**
- AMS: Auxiliary Medical Services
- CAS: Civil Aid Service
- CSD: Correctional Services Department
- HKG: Hong Kong Government
- MHD: Department of Health
- RHKPF: Royal Hong Kong Police Force

**Non-Government Organisations**
- BRC: British Red Cross
- CAC: Christian Alliance Church
- CFSI: Community and Family Services International
- ESF: Ecoles Sans Frontières
- GSAC: Garden Streams “Art in the Camps” Project
- HKCAR: Hong Kong Christian Aid to Refugees
- HKFPA: Hong Kong Family Planning Association
- ISS: International Social Service (Hong Kong branch)
- MSF: Medicins Sans Frontières
- SCF: Save the Children Fund
- UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

The following description of the detention centres in Hong Kong was obtained from Refugee Concern Hong Kong (1991b:52-77).
ARGYLE STREET DETENTION CENTRE

Population         Approximately 1300 [1991] (capacity 1300)
Location          Argyle Street, Kowloon
Management        Civil Aid Service
Screening        Screening is not being carried out at Argyle Street

Description
Argyle Street Detention Centre was opened circa 1979. (It closed for a short time and was reopened in 1988). The asylum-seekers are housed in five residential huts, with approximately 250 people living in each hut. Half of one hut is for pregnant women.

Major problems: because of the small size of the centre, the area around each hut is minute; access to agency and activity area is severely restricted; limited amount of recreational activities.

Services provided by the different agencies

Food
Charcoal burners are available to re-heat the food that is provided.
Agency       Service Provided
CAS           Food

Health
Agency       Service Provided
MHD           Medical - curative and health education
AMS           Medical - curative
SCF           health education, ante-natal, well-baby and hospital visits
Rotary        Dental
HKFPA         Family Planning
Treats        Hospital visits

Education
Agency       Service Provided
SCF           Pre-school
ISS           Primary, secondary and adult education and library

Welfare and work
Agency       Service Provided
CFSI          Social counselling and community development
SCF           Community development
CAS           Family reunion
HKCAR         Skills and vocational training, income generation work and shop
UNHCR         Overall coordination and family reunion
Recreation and general services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agency</th>
<th>Service Provided</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ISS</td>
<td>Adult and children’s recreation and handicrafts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCF</td>
<td>Children’s recreation, children’s outings and remittances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HKCAR</td>
<td>Handicrafts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treats</td>
<td>Children’s outings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAS</td>
<td>Mail</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**CHI MA WAN DETENTION CENTRE (LOWER)**

Population | Approximately 1900 [1991] (capacity 1900)
Location    | Peninsula on the southeast coast of Lantau Island
Management  | Correctional Services Department
Screening   | The majority of the population is comprised of screened-out asylum-seekers

Description

The centre was opened in 1982 as a closed centre for holding refugees. It came into operation as a detention centre in August 1988. The camp was originally designed for single women and family units - no single men over 21 are located in Chi Ma Wan. There are 7 dormitory huts in all, 3 for single women and 4 for family units. Each hut houses 250-300 people in 3 tiered bunks. The majority of the population is from north Vietnam with only one hut for Southerners.

Major problems: because a large part of the community has been screened out there is at times a feeling of despair in the centre.

Services provided by the different agencies

**Food**

There are facilitates for re-heating food.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agency</th>
<th>Service Provided</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CSD</td>
<td>Food</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Health**

There is a small hospital for minor ailments located within the centre. Pregnant women are transferred to Argyle Street Centre at 28 weeks, later to give birth in Queen Elizabeth Hospital.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agency</th>
<th>Service Provided</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MHD</td>
<td>Medical - curative &amp; ante-natal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MHD</td>
<td>Dental</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSF</td>
<td>Health education, well-baby and family planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HKFPA</td>
<td>Family Planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treats</td>
<td>Hospital visits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSD</td>
<td>Hospital visits</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Education
Agency   Service Provided
Caritas   Primary, secondary and adult education and library
HKCAR     Adult education

Welfare and work
Agency   Service Provided
CFSI     Social counselling and community development
UNHCR    Overall coordination and family reunion
HKCAR    Skills and vocational training, canteen and shop
Caritas  Income generation work and gardening
Dutch Ladies Income generation work

Recreation and general services
Agency   Service Provided
Caritas  Adult and children’s recreation, handicrafts, outings for children and camp publication
CFSI     Outings for children
Treats   Art/drama
HKCAR    Handicrafts
CSD      Mail and remittances

CHI MA WAN DETENTION CENTRE (UPPER)
Population Transient population. (capacity 464)
Location Southeast coast of Lantau Island
Management Correctional Services Department

Description
Upper Chi Ma Wan Detention Centre was taken over by the CSD in 1956 and converted into a minimum security prison. In September 1985 it was used as a Vietnamese closed centre. In July 1988 it became operational as a detention centre. On 30 May 1990 Chi Ma Wan Detention Centre (Upper) came into operation to accommodate Vietnamese Boat People in the following categories:

a) VBP who have committed frequent and serious breaches of discipline under the Detention Centre Rules.
b) VBP who are suspected to have committed criminal offences and are under police investigation.
c) VBP who have to be separated for their own interest.
d) VBP who have repeatedly absconded.
e) VBP who have demonstrated a propensity for violence
f) VBP who have actively engaged in inciting others to act against the good order of the centres.
g) VBP who are suspected of threatening or exerting pressure on others.
h) VBP who have just been released from prison and require adjustment before returning to their original centres.

In its guidance notes for Justices of the Peace, CSD states the following:

"The progress of every VBP in this area is reviewed by a Board of Review chaired by the Superintendent with others as members. The board makes recommendations as to whether the detention should continue or the VBP is suitable to be returned to his original centre."

"The VBP, upon approval by CSD HQ, admitted to Chi Ma Wan Detention Centre (U) will first be located in cellular accommodation and then in dormitory as behaviour improves."

"The VBP will be locked in at night and not allowed free movement in the centre."

"Other privileges for the VBP will be the same as in any other detention centre."

The centre is divided into two parts: comprising 3 blocks of dormitories and 4 blocks of cellular type accommodation with built-in toilet and washing facilities.

Major problems: transience camp population and inadequate services provided to the asylum-seekers detained here.

**Services provided by the different agencies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agency</th>
<th>Services Provided</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HKG</td>
<td>Provides food and medical services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caritas</td>
<td>Provides English classes, library service, camp magazine and art classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HKCAR</td>
<td>Provides skills and vocational training</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**GREEN ISLAND DETENTION CENTRE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Transient population (capacity 480)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Green Island is off the NW tip of Hong Kong Island</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management</td>
<td>Correctional Services Department</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Description**

All new arrivals are taken to Green Island for initial documentation and medical screening.

Green Island was formerly an ammunition warehouse of the Royal Hong Kong Police Force. In October 1988 the CSD took over the responsibility of managing the centre from the Civil Aid Services. CSD states that "Green Island Reception Centre serves as a first
station or quarantine station to receive Vietnamese Boat People on their arrival in Hong Kong."

The marine police transport the asylum-seekers to Green Island. CSD log the new arrivals and give each individual a reference number. (Boats arriving in Hong Kong throughout the year are numbered chronologically, so the person who arrived first on the first boat of 1990 was given the number 1/1/90.) The immigration officers fill in the bio-data on each asylum-seeker to determine the status of each new arrival.

Nursing staff in the sick bay assist the doctor from the Port Health Service to provide medical and health care to the boat people. They carry out the quarantine procedures for new arrivals which include head delousing, deworming and spraying carbaryl dust (anti-plague powder). They also check for communicable diseases and if necessary start asylum-seekers on immunization courses.

CSD states that "a one-week induction programme is run in the centre to offer assistance and guidance for the boat people in coping with the demands upon them and ensuring that they lead a law-abiding life. It also aims at informing the boat people of their status and rights."

Green Island consists of 4 dormitories, A, B, C and D and according to CSD are used in the following way:

- Dormitory A will be converted into a Vetting Office to render the vetting process by personnel of Immigration Department more efficient. It will comprise 10 interview rooms and offices.
- Dormitory B is mainly used to accommodate new arrivals for spraying carbaryl dust and malathion. Part of it is converted into an UNHCR office.
- Dormitories C and D provide accommodation for the boat people. Each dormitory can house 240 people.

In addition there is an administration block and sick bay.

Green Island does not have a fresh water supply of its own. Its daily water supply is provided by the water boat, Union Co. Ltd. The storage capacity of 140 tons is sufficient to meet the consumption needs of the boat people for 2 days.

The centre is reached by boat in approximately half an hour.

Once the documentation and medical screening has been completed (about 7 days) the asylum-seekers are transferred to other detention centres as accommodation becomes available.
HEI LING CHAU DETENTION CENTRE

Population  Approximately 2750 [1991] (capacity 2880)
Location   Hei Ling Chau is an island near Lantau Island
Management Correctional Services Department
Screening Hei Ling Chau is one of the centres where screening takes place

Description
Hei Ling Chau was designated as a detention centre in July 1988; previous to that it was a closed centre. The entire population was transferred from Tai A Chau in 1989. In the main, the asylum-seekers originated from 3 different Northern provinces. ... Within the perimeter fence there are 14 dormitory huts with built-in toilets, a clinic, two service centres, a close observation unit, communal showers, a kitchen block, a barber shop and a reception office. each hut houses about 200 people in 3 tiers of bunks.

Access to Hei Ling Chau is by Government ferry from Queens Pier and public ferry from Peng Chau.

Major problems: water supply insufficient at times and the large proportion of single men (over 200) does tend to have a disruptive effect on the community.

Services provided by the different agencies

Food
There are facilities for re-cooking of food.

Agency     Service Provided
HKG         Food

Health
There is a small clinic for admission of minor ailments. More serious cases have to be transferred to Hong Kong. Pregnant women over 28 weeks are transferred to Argyle Street, later to give birth at a Kowloon hospital.

Agency     Service Provided
MHD         Medical - curative & ante-natal
SCF         Health education, ante-natal and well-baby
HKFPA       Family Planning
Rotary      Dental
Treats      Hospital visits
CSD         Hospital visits

Education
Agency     Service Provided
SCF         Primary, secondary and adult education and library
### Welfare and work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agency</th>
<th>Service Provided</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CFSI</td>
<td>Social counselling and community development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNHCR</td>
<td>Overall coordination and family reunion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HKCAR</td>
<td>Skills and vocational training, income generation work, canteen and shop</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Recreation and general services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agency</th>
<th>Service Provided</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SCF</td>
<td>Adult and children’s recreation, children’s outings and camp publication.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HKCAR</td>
<td>Handicrafts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GSAC</td>
<td>Children’s recreation and outings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treats</td>
<td>Children’s outings and playground equipment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSD</td>
<td>Mail and remittances</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### HIGH ISLAND DETENTION CENTRE

**Population**  
Approximately 6750 [1991] (capacity 6600)

**Location**  
Within Sai Kung country park

**Management**  
Police

**Screening**  
Screening began in late September 1990

### Description

High Island Detention Centre is located in an isolated position within Sai Kung country park. The centre is divided into two main sections, North and South camp. The North camp is made up of people from Hai Phong and Quang Ninh while the South camp has an integrated community. There is an additional small section, called West Camp, which is used for isolation of troublemakers and their families. There are 8 residential huts in the North Camp and 14 in the South Camp with an average of 120 family units living in each hut.

Major problems: water supply and drainage; lack of recreational activities; no facilities to reheat or cook own food.

### Services provided by the different agencies

#### Food

There is no provision for reheating or self cooking

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agency</th>
<th>Service Provided</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RHKPF</td>
<td>Food</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Health

There is a clinic, with a 24 hour service, for minor ailments. More serious cases are transferred, in the main, to the Prince of Wales Hospital.
Agency | Service Provided
--- | ---
BRC | Medical - curative and ante-natal
SCF | Health education and well-baby
HKFPA | Family Planning
Rotary | Dental
MHD | Immunization
Treats | Hospital visits
RHKPF | Hospital visits

**Education**

*Agency | Service Provided
--- | ---
SCF | Pre-school
ISS | Primary, secondary and adult education and library

**Welfare and Work**

*Agency | Service Provided
--- | ---
CFSI | Social counselling and community development
UNHCR | Overall coordination and family reunion
RHKPF | Community development and family reunion
HKCAR | Skills and vocational training, income generation work and shop

**Recreation and General Services**

*Agency | Service Provided
--- | ---
ISS | Adult recreation
RHKPF | Adult recreation
HKCAR | Adult recreation
GSAC | Art and drama

**LO WU DETENTION CENTRE (Voluntary Repatriation Transit Centre)**

**Population** Transient population (capacity 900)

**Location** Lo Wu (on the Hong Kong/Chinese border)

**Management** Royal Hong Kong Police

**Description**

Within one or two weeks of signing up for voluntary repatriation the returnees are transferred to Lo Wu. They stay there for approximately one month so that immigration formalities can be carried out before they fly back to Vietnam. Each adult is given US$50 and each child US$25 to buy essentials to take back to Vietnam. This is in addition to the integration allowance they receive when back in Vietnam.

There are 10 huts, one of which is for single women. Each hut houses about 80 people in two-tiered bunk beds. Each hut has facilities for reheating food. There is a shop for asylum-seekers to purchase any items they might need to take back with them to Vietnam.
Service provided by different agencies

HKG  Food
MHD  Health service
ISS  Education (school)
HKCAR  Shop
CFSI  Social counselling
UNHCR  Processing for voluntary repatriation and overall coordination

## Nei Kwu Chau Detention Centre

**Population**  Approximately 470 [1991] (capacity 720)
**Location**  On the south side of Hei Ling Chau Island
**Management**  Correctional Services Department
**Screening**  Screening takes place at Hei Ling Chau. Almost the entire population is screened-out

**Description**
Nei Kwu Chau was formerly a correctional institution. It was converted and gazetted as a detention centre in September 1989. The population is mainly made up of ethnic Chinese. A large proportion of the asylum-seekers underwent the Rapid Screening Programme\(^1\) at the beginning of 1990, (the programme was subsequently scrapped after about 10 weeks) shortly after their arrival at the Green Island detention Centre. There are 10 huts. Each hut houses approximately 50 people in two-tiered bunks.

Major problems: water supply insufficient at times; there is unease amongst the population that if an agreement is reached on forcible repatriation they may be the first to be sent back.

**Services provided by the different agencies**

**Food**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agency</th>
<th>Service Provided</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HKG</td>
<td>Food</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Health**

There is a small clinic for minor ailments. More serious cases are transferred to a Government hospital. Pregnant women over 28 weeks are transferred to Argyle Street.

---

\(^1\) "Early in 1990, when it appeared that the Hong Kong Government might reach agreement with Vietnam to continue compulsory returns, the authorities in Hong Kong began to carry out ‘rapid screening’ of newly-arrived asylum seekers at Green Island Reception Centre. The aim of the rapid screening procedure was apparently to return those screened out to Vietnam as soon as possible after their arrival in Hong Kong. However, with the failure to reach agreement with Vietnam on compulsory returns, the procedure was suspended in March [1990]” (Refugee Concern Hong Kong, 1991:5).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agency</th>
<th>Service Provided</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MHD</td>
<td>Medical services - curative and immunization programmes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCF</td>
<td>Health education and well-baby</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HKFPA</td>
<td>Family planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rotary</td>
<td>Dental</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Education**
- **Agency**: SCF
- **Service Provided**: Pre-school, primary and secondary

**Welfare and Work**
- **Agency**: CFSI
- **Service Provided**: Social counselling and community development
- **Agency**: HKCAR
- **Service Provided**: Skills and vocational training
- **Agency**: UNHCR
- **Service Provided**: Overall coordination and family reunion

**SEK KONG DETENTION CENTRE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Approximately 7600 [1991] (capacity 9000)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Royal Air Force (RAF) runway, Sek Kong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management</td>
<td>Royal Hong Kong Police Force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Screening</td>
<td>There is no screening being carried out at Sek Kong except for family reunion cases.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Description**

This centre was opened in May 1989 to cope with the large influx of asylum-seekers at that time. Previous to that it was an RAF airfield. Sek Kong is divided into four sections, A, B, C and D which allows for separation of asylum-seekers from different provinces. In two of the sections the asylum-seekers are housed in tents and in the other sections they are housed in romney huts. On average there are about 50 people per tent and about 265 people per romney hut.

Major problems: romney huts are too hot in summer; tents are too cold in winter; flooding and poor drainage during the wet season.

**Services provided by the different agencies**

**Food**
- All the families have charcoal burners to reheat food
- **Agency**: HKG
- **Service Provided**: Food
Health
There is 24 hour medical cover

Agency  Service Provided
HKG  Medical - curative
SCF  Medical - ante-natal, health education, well baby and hospital visits
HKG  Dental
HKFPA  Family Planning
CAC  Hospital visits

Education
Pre-school, primary, secondary and limited adult education provided

Welfare and Work
Agency  Service Provided
CFSI  Social counselling and community development
HKCAR  Skills and vocational training and income generation work
UNHCR  Overall coordination and family reunion

Recreation and general services
Agency  Service Provided
CFSI  Handicrafts
HKCAR  Handicrafts
Treats  Children’s outings
ISS  Camp publication
RHKPF  Mail

TAI A CHAU

Population  Capacity 10,000
Location  Tai A Chau, an island in the Soko group of islands (approximately 18 km from Hong Kong Central).
Management  Hong Kong Housing Services for Refugees (HKHSR).

Description
Tai A Chau opened in February 1991. It differs from the other detention centres, which are managed by the disciplined services (CSD, RHKPF or CAS), because it is privately managed by HKHSR, and asylum-seekers are allowed access to all parts of the island. There is a police presence.

According to HKHSR the idea of Tai A Chau is to pursue a more liberal outlook and to allow the asylum-seekers more involvement and control in the day-to-day internal management of the Centre.
The asylum-seekers are housed in dormitories with triple bunks. Ferries service Tai A Chau from Blake Pier and Cheung Chau.

**Services provided by the different agencies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agency</th>
<th>Service</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UNHCR</td>
<td>Field officer and overall coordination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MHD</td>
<td>Curative medical care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCF</td>
<td>Well-baby clinic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISS</td>
<td>Primary and secondary education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CFSI</td>
<td>Social counselling and community development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HKCAR</td>
<td>Skills and vocational training</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At the date of printing this was all the information available.

**WHITEHEAD DETENTION CENTRE**

**Population**

Approximately 22,500 [1991] (capacity 24,600)

**Location**

Wu Kwai Sha Tsui, Shatin, NT

**Management**

Correctional Services Department

**Screening**

Over 10,000 (almost half the camp population) have been screened out

**Description**

Whitehead is by far the biggest detention centre in Hong Kong. The population is more than three times greater than in High Island, the next largest detention centre. It is divided into 10 sections.

**Sections 1, 2, 7 and 8.**

A Superintendent who is under the direct command of the Senior Superintendent is in charge of these four sections and is responsible for management and day-to-day operation. He is assisted by four Chief Officers and other supporting staff.

Sections 1 and 2 became operational in January 1989 and sections 7 and 8 in June 1989. These four sections consist of 40 dormitories providing accommodation for 8,000 people. Facilities include communal toilets and bathrooms, washing and drying areas, clinics and sick bays, kitchens, service centres, dining halls, special units, offices for centre administration and for staff of UNHCR and voluntary agencies.

The sick bay has 84 beds. Medical services are provided by a team of medical officers and nursing staff from the Department of Health and CSD.
Sections 3, 4, 5 and 6

A Superintendent who is under the direct command of the Senior Superintendent is in charge of these four sections. He is assisted by four Chief Officers and other supporting staff.

Section 3 and 6 became operational in December 1989 and 4 and 5 in January 1990. These four sections consist of 52 dormitories providing accommodation for 10,000 people. Facilities are the same for sections 1, 2, 7 and 8.

A Superintendent who is under the direct command of the Senior Superintendent is in charge of these four sections and is responsible for management and day-to-day operation. He is assisted by four Chief Officers and other supporting staff.

Sections 9 and 10

A Superintendent who is under the direct command of the Senior Superintendent is in charge of these four sections. He is assisted by four Chief Officers and other supporting staff.

Section 10 became operational in March 1990 and section 9 in January May 1990. These two sections consist of 22 dormitories providing accommodation for 7,000 people. Facilities are similar to those provide in other sections.

The sick bay has 9 beds. Medical services are provided by MSF.

Major problems: the vast size of the centre. Mr. Robert Van Leeuwen (Chief of Mission, UNHCR) said in May 1990 that “Whitehead has become a monster so big that the problems of maintaining security and control within the camp have multiplied disproportionally.”

Services provided by the different agencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HKG</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Health</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Convalescents and asylum-seekers with minor ailments are treated in sick bay. More serious cases and pregnant cases about to give birth are sent to Government hospitals. Whitehead is the only detention centre with its own full-time dentist.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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2 During a visit to Whitehead Detention Centre in December 1994, it was revealed that Section 10 had been reserved for those asylum-seekers who had volunteered for repatriation to Vietnam.
Agency | Service Provided
---|---
HKG | Medical - curative, ante-natal and health education
MSF | Medical - curative, ante-natal and health education
Rotary/HKCAR | Dental
SCF | Well baby
HKFPA | Family Planning
Caritas | Hospital visits
Treats | Hospital visits

**Education**

Pre-school, primary, secondary and adult education provided

Agency | Service Provided
---|---
SCF | Pre-school education
ISS | Primary, secondary and adult education and library

**Welfare and Work**

Agency | Service Provided
---|---
CFSI | Social counselling and community development
HKCAR | Skills and vocational training and income generation work
UNHCR | Overall coordination and family reunion

**Recreation and general services**

Agency | Service Provided
---|---
ISS | Adult and children recreation and camp publication
GSAC | Handicrafts, art and drama and camp publication
Treats | Children’s outings
CSD | Mail and remittances

**KAI TAK TRANSIT CENTRE**

**Population** | Approximately 1,150 [1991] (capacity 2200)
**Location** | 2 Kwun Tong Road
**Management** | HKCAR

**Description**

Kai Tak Transit Centre was opened in August 1979. It is an open centre and refugees are allowed to work in the outside community while awaiting resettlement processing. According to HKCAR, refugees are able to go out at will but camp management keeps control of those allowed in. Wherever practicable, consultation takes place with the refugees on matters pertaining to the management of the centre.
The refugees are housed in 13 huts in triple bunks. Provision is made for the special accommodation needs of vulnerable groups such as unaccompanied minors and single women.

**Services provided by the different agencies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agency</th>
<th>Services</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UNHCR</td>
<td>Field officer and overall coordination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HKCAR</td>
<td>Primary and secondary education and childcare centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>First aid post and well-baby clinic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Job placement unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CFSI</td>
<td>Social counselling and community development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caritas</td>
<td>Resettlement counselling and processing and social assistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HKFPA</td>
<td>Family planning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**PILLAR POINT OPEN CENTRE**

**Population**  
Approximately 5,000 [1991] (capacity 5,088)

**Location**  
76 Lung Mun Road, Area 46, Tuen Mun, N.T.

**Management**  
Hong Kong Housing Services for Refugees (HKHSR)

**Description**

Pillar Point opened in July 1989. It is managed by HKHSR and funded by UNHCR. It comprises 47 blocks of accommodation. Accommodation consists of 4 person and 6 person units, each with a small kitchen area. Toilet facilities are in communal blocks. Refugees are expected to pay rent, managerial fees and electricity and water bills. In the case of hardship, Caritas organises funding to cover the day-to-day necessities.

The residents are free to leave the centres for work in the outside community whilst awaiting resettlement processing. Secondary school children go to a Vietnamese school in Yuen Long which is run by ISS. According to HKHSR, Pillar Point is run as a normal housing estate area and in many ways can be looked upon as a training ground to equip refugees with a realistic idea of what to expect when they are resettled.

**Service provided by the different agencies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agency</th>
<th>Services</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UNHCR</td>
<td>Field officer and overall coordination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSF</td>
<td>Curative medical services and ante-natal (24 hour medical cover)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISS</td>
<td>Primary and secondary education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caritas</td>
<td>Resettlement counselling and processing and social assistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CFSI</td>
<td>Social counselling and community development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HKCAR</td>
<td>Job placement unit</td>
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<tr>
<td>HKFPA</td>
<td>Family planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESF</td>
<td>French language courses</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TUEN MUN OPEN CENTRE

Population     Approximately 1600 [1991] (capacity 2900)
Location       Fu Tei Chung, Tuen Mun
Management     Hong Kong Housing Authority

Description
The centre, originally known as Bowring Army Camp, was opened for use as a Vietnamese reception centre in March 1985. It was designated a closed centre for some 4,000 refugees and managed by CSD until May 1990 when it was redesignated as an open centre, to be run by the Housing Department. Security at the centre is provided by guards on a 24 hour basis. All refugees are allocated free accommodation in triple-tier bunks inside 18 barrack type dormitories. The centre provides communal bathrooms, toilets, wash areas and detached cooking areas. There are open spaces for outdoor activities and rooms for educational and training purposes.

According to the Housing Department, the population is comprised of mainly family groups but also includes a few single persons and unaccompanied minors. The residents are free to leave the centre daily for work in the outside community while awaiting resettlement processing. Outsiders are not allowed in without permission. Secondary school children attend a Vietnamese school in Yuen Long which is run by ISS.

Service provided by the different agencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agency</th>
<th>Services</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UNHCR</td>
<td>Field officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSF</td>
<td>Curative medical services and ante-natal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCF</td>
<td>Kindergarten and primary school and well-baby clinic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Caritas</td>
<td>Resettlement counselling and processing and social assistance</td>
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<td>CFSI</td>
<td>Social counselling and community development</td>
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<td>HKFPA</td>
<td>Family planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESF</td>
<td>French language courses</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX 9

LETTER OF REJECTION

REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES
DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE
BUREAU OF IMMIGRATION AND DEPORTATION
MANILA

18 September 1991

Mottram bay
Philippine First Asylum Camp
Palawan

We wish to inform you that on 20 March 1991, the Bureau of Immigration and Deportation rendered a decision denying your claims to refugee status. Please find attached a copy of the decision.

Under the Rules on Determination of Refugee Status, Appeal, Sec. 1, you may appeal from this decision by filing notice of appeal with the Appeal Board, through the Task Force on International Refugee Assistance and Administration, Department of Foreign Affairs, Manila, within fifteen (15) days from your receipt of a copy of the decision. The notice of appeal shall state the reasons why the decision should be reversed and why the claim for refugee status should be granted. It may also contain a request to submit within another period of fifteen (15) days from the filing of the notice of appeal an extended written statement in support of the appeal, together with such documents which the appellant may deem material to his appeal.

Under Sec. 2, the decision denying the claim for refugee status shall become final if no appeal therefrom is made within the period of fifteen (15) days from the asylum seeker’s receipt of any copy thereof. In such event, the asylum seeker shall be deemed to have chosen voluntary repatriation.

[Signature]
Leonardo C. Aguilar, Jr.
Associate Commissioner

I hereby certify that I have this _____ day of ______________ received a copy of the decision stated 20 March 1991 rendered on my application for refugee status.

Mottram bay (PS000000)

________________________
Signature
FACTS:

The applicant is 25 years old.

He was told that his father was killed in action in Phung Hoang air base in 1965 (posthumous award).

In 1972, their house and their community were overrunned [sic] by the communists and they fled to ถนน where they stayed until 1977. In 1977, the whole family was ordered to go to the NEZ. The family is still at the NEZ up to now. He has 1 full-blooded sister and 6 half siblings.

Before 1975, his mother was a vendor.

From 1965 to 1977, the mother had no particular job but relied on her properties for a living.

The applicant's stepfather was a corporal 1st class until 1975. From 1975 to 1977, the stepfather was a woodcutter. Thereafter the whole family worked as farmer and woodcutter.

The stepfather was locally reeducated for 7 days.

They always had the family book at ถนน at the NEZ.

The applicant finished level eight in 1980. He stopped for 6 months just before they transferred to the NEZ, but was able to get NEZ permission to continue his studies in ถนน.

After level 9, and due to family difficulties, he went back and joined his family at the NEZ. He was a NEZ farmer and upon reaching 18 years old in 1983, he was classified as a member of class “C” of the NEZ labour group. He did labour for the C team from 1983 to 1985. Then he was transferred to “A” team and did labour there until 1987 (A team - heavier labour). His parcel of farming land was not fertile and he was given a high quota which he could not meet with his own harvest, he even had to cut firewood and sell it just to pay his quota and support the family.

On October 1987, in the course of cutting firewood with three companions he was arrested by 3 armed Fulro members who explained to him Fulro policy and objectives. These Fulro people got their addresses, asked them to supply kerosene, cigar lighter flints, and salt, on specific dates (ex. once every 2 months) to be delivered in the same area. They agreed so that they can enter the area and cut firewood.
On January 1988, his stepfather and a friend’s father were captured by the Fulro so the applicant and his friend will agree to be Fulro members. They were told that the two old men will be killed if they do not work for Fulro by giving the supplies and to contact other Fulro members by the Fulro flaglets given to both of them (applicant spontaneously exhibited 2 Fulro flagets). Up to now, they don’t have any direct communication with the 2 fathers. They only got news of them from another member. Thus they gave the supplies promised and followed some Fulro orders given to them like contacting other members as a communication liaison member once they received their flaglets.

Fulro is an anti-communist organization (liberation front for the uncivilised people who were persecuted by the communists). The leader was Colonel Romave (ethnic minority) but his team leader was TOI. The estimated number of members of the unit was 30 to 40 persons. Tuu was the order relayer to the applicant.

On October 1988, at 10:00 p.m., on the way to the jungle to meet the Fulro members, the applicant (receiver person) who was carrying a package from LOI (delivery person) was arrested by one armed communist police and 9 armed guerillas. His hands were tied at the back and he was brought to the village office where the package was opened they found 2 hammak [sic], 2 nylon sheets, 4 kilos salt, 2 boxes flints, 15 metres of parachute string, some AR-15 and AKA ammunition rounds, 1 bayonet and 2 hand grenades, 1 bottle of kerosene, etc. They arrived in the village office at around 1 a.m. (10 km.). He did not declare that the ammunition was Fulro and told them that he just picked them up and the rest were his belongings. He told them he was going to hunt wild animals. Thus, he was hit by a weapon and put to a room.

The following morning, he was brought to the provisional police station. There he was treated badly, leg cuffed. Because he didn’t declare the truth for fear that his stepfather might be killed by Fulro members. After 4 days, he was sent to T-20 where he stayed 2 months. Due to a leg infection caused by the leg cuffs, he was transferred to a hospital in Benh Vien Da Khoa, Da Lai province and confined for 7 days. On the 7th day, he fled to Da Nang province where he stayed for 7 days also. Then to Nha Trang where he stayed with a fisherman friend who let him stay on his boat until the final escape on August 1989. He clandestinely departed from Vietnam for the following reasons:
1. Being a prisoner.
2. If he’ll declare his Fulro activities in prison, his stepfather will be killed by other Fulro members.
3. So that the communist won’t discover Fulro and to avoid death of father.
4. Fulro is an anti-communist organization, if it won’t be discovered, specially their area in the [unintelligible], other resistance troops abroad may take advantage of their mountain position as a shelter.
5. Didn’t really want to leave his country because he has no relative in 3rd country but he wanted to avoid family harassment.
6. An escape from prison and his life was threatened.
FINDINGS:

The family stays at the NEZ up to the present (beginning 1977). Does not necessarily indicate discrimination as the NEZ is part of the national policy to decongest crowded places. Duration of NEZ stay for nearly 13 years may even indicate the tolerability of their situation there. However, he was able to get NEZ permission to continue his studies in [removed].

He should have lived normally inside the NEZ if he did not involve himself in the activities of Fulro. He stated that while in the NEZ he usually go out at night and meet some Fulro members. He helped them in carry ammunitions from one place to another (in the mountain).

He was arrested and investigated for 2 months due to these activities. Tortured and hospitalized then, escaped from the hospital because of the fear that if he will be investigated again and forced to reveal the Fulro activities, his stepfather will be killed by its members.

This arrest and investigation is a normal policy in Vietnam especially those persons suspected of being a member of the anti-communist organization.

The fear he is claiming is just a mere figment of his imagination. His escape from Vietnam could be contributed to his fear of being arrested.

Wherefore, in view of the foregoing, applicant does not meet the criteria for refugee status under the 1951 Geneva Convention and the 1967 Protocol. Applicant is hereby DENIED refugee status.

20 March 1991, Puerto Princesa City, Palawan

[signature]
Luzviminda G. Molina
Immigration Officer
B.I.D
APPENDIX 10

HONG KONG IMMIGRATION DEPARTMENT’S INTERVIEW FORM FOR VIETNAMESE ASYLUM-SEEKERS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ref. Number</th>
<th>Interviewer</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td></td>
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(If the space provided for any answer is insufficient, continue on a separate sheet in dictating clearly the section and question number. All questions must be completed).

SECTION A: PERSONAL DETAILS

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<th>SPOUSE</th>
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<td>Last address in Vietnam</td>
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<tr>
<td>2)</td>
<td>FATHER</td>
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</thead>
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<td>Religion</td>
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SECTION B: INTERVIEWEE'S BACKGROUND

1) EDUCATION (classes and periods of attendance if possible)

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<th>Primary</th>
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<td>Secondary</td>
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<td>University</td>
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<td>Qualifications</td>
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<td>Language qualifications</td>
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2) EMPLOYMENT

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<th>PREVIOUS (pre-1975)</th>
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<td>Nature</td>
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<td>Period (dates)</td>
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P.1 to P.5
DATA COLLECTED BY
I.A: ____________
O.I: ____________
DATE: ____________
3) MILITARY SERVICE

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<td>Period served</td>
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<td>Place served (nearest town also)</td>
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Have you evaded or attempted to evade the draft or deserted from military service? If yes, describe the circumstances, the reasons which motivated your act and its consequences for you and your family, if any.
SECTION C: GENERAL BACKGROUND ON INTERVIEWEE AND MEMBERS OF FAMILY

1) GENERAL BACKGROUND

(i) Describe your own and your family’s situation since the period immediately before 1975 until present times in general terms.

(ii) What post did you or the head of your family* hold in the army, in the administration, in the private sector or elsewhere during this period? How, if at all, did your circumstances change during the period under review?

(iii) Did you or any close members of your family undergo re-education? If so, when and for what duration? Was anyone otherwise imprisoned and if so for what reason and for what period?

(iv) Were you or any member of your family sent to work in the new economic zones and if yes, under what circumstances?

(v) If you claim that you or any close member of your family were treated differently by the authorities from other persons in similar circumstances, give examples.

* The head of a family could refer to a parent, sibling or a close relative who had a provider for the family.
(2) INVOLVEMENT IN POLITICAL PARTIES AND RESISTANCE ORGANISATIONS

As much detail as possible should be given on activities, in order to assess the extent of involvement.

(i) How did you become involved?

(ii) When was the first contact with this organization?

(iii) Give names of leaders of the organization.

(iv) Give details of meetings, demonstrations etc., dates and how often; the part you played?

(v) Have you ever taken part in or actively supported military armed activities against the authorities of your country? If yes, provide full details.

(vi) Provide any documentary evidence - membership card or letter of support from organization.

(vii) Have you or any close member of your family been in trouble with the authorities because of his involvement? If yes, give details.
(3) INVOLVEMENT IN RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES

As much details as possible should be given on activities, in order to assess the extent of involvement, e.g:

(i) Have you or has any close member of your family been in trouble with the authorities for practicing your religion? If yes, give details of circumstances.

(ii) Did you or any close member of your family participate in public religious activities besides the normal religious practice? If yes, given details and indicate what were the consequences from the authorities, if any.

(iii) Are you or any close member of your family member of any particular religious or ethnic-religious sect or movement? If yes, give details.

(iv) Have you or any close member of your family been in trouble with the authorities of your country because of this membership? If yes, give details.
(4) ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RIGHTS

(i) Have you or the head of your family (if different) been asked to leave your profession or habitual place of residence or ancestral land and to move to other areas, professions, etc. If so, what were the consequences?

(ii) Was whole or part of the property, land, farm or fishery produce belonging to you or your family unit ever confiscated by the authorities? If yes, describe the reasons, circumstances and consequences.

(iii) Were you or any close member of your family ever deprived of family card, food subsidy, ration card of any rights ordinarily accorded to other Vietnamese citizens? If yes, explain the circumstances, reasons and consequences.

(iv) Were the children in your family denied educational opportunities by the authorities? If yes, for what reason.

(v) Were you ever subjected to unpaid forced labour? If yes, under the circumstances, reasons and what duration?
(5) BACKGROUND OF FAMILY MOVEMENTS

(i) Have you or any close member of your family emigrated either to other countries or across the DMZ from the North to the South or vice versa before 1975. If so, did this affect your own or family situation.

(ii) Have you or members of your family ever made journeys outside Vietnam? If so, who, when, where and for what reasons?

(iii) Have you or your close relatives tried to leave Vietnam illegally in the past? If so, were you caught, by whom and what were the consequences of your capture? (If detained, for how long and under what circumstances?).
(6) PROSECUTION RECORD

(i) Have you or any close member of your family ever been convicted of a criminal offence? If yes, give details.

(ii) Have you or any close member of your family ever been deported from another country or expelled from your country? If yes, give details.

(iii) Have you or any close member of your family ever been in trouble with the authorities in your own country for alleged criminal offences? If so, give details.
SECTION D : MOTIVES

(i) Why did you leave Vietnam?

(ii) if you do not wish to return there, explain why?
SECTION E: POINTS NOT COVERED ABOVE

Are there any other points not covered by the questions above which the interviewee wishes to make?

SECTION F: ADDITIONAL COMMENTS, IF ANY, BY THE INTERVIEWING OFFICER

Interpreter’s signature

Interviewer’s signature
IMPORTANT

1. This card entitles you to enroll in any educational organization officially recognized in RRTC and register with the Work Credit Program.

2. You must present this card when you begin and complete a course.

3. Present this card whenever called to the UNHCR Resettlement Office or any office.

4. Present this card to seek departure clearance for final approval before departure to resettlement country.

5. All minors between the ages of 6 and 16 (inclusive) are required to attend general educational classes.

6. It is to the resettlement advantage of every adult over the age of 16 to attend language skills classes.

CHÚ Í

1. The name is only used as a registration and does not form a part of the curriculum.

2. Present this card whenever called to the UNHCR Resettlement Office or any office.

3. Present this card whenever called to the UNHCR Resettlement Office or any office.

4. Present this card to seek departure clearance for final approval before departure to resettlement country.

5. All minors between the ages of 6 and 16 (inclusive) are required to attend general educational classes.

6. It is to the resettlement advantage of every adult over the age of 16 to attend language skills classes.

PHILIPPINE REFUGEE PROCESSING CENTER
REGIONAL RESETTLEMENT TRANSIT CENTER
Sabang, Morong, Bataan

REFUGEE CARD

Date of Arrival: __________
Proflight Number: __________
Group Number: __________

Name: __________
Bulit No.: __________ Date of Birth: __________ Age: __________ Sex: __________

Case Number: __________
Signature of Refugee

EDUCATION/LANGUAGE LEVEL
Agency: __________ Staff: __________ Date: __________

UNHCR Officer
Date: __________

RPRP Officer
Date: __________

A. GENERAL ORIENTATION
STAFF: __________
DATE: __________

B. NEIGHBORHOOD ORIENTATION
STAFF: __________
DATE: __________

C. DEPARTURE CLEARANCE

WCS Coordinator
Date: __________

Building Leader
Date: __________

RPS
Date: __________

COAO
Date: __________

EMG Leadman
Date: __________

ISS
Date: __________
### A. ENROLLMENT IN LANGUAGE/KNOWLEDGE TRAINING

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### B. WORK CREDIT SYSTEM ACTIVITIES

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<th>REMARKS</th>
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### C. COMMUNITY INITIATED ACTIVITIES/OTHER TRAININGS

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<th>Remarks</th>
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The Community Refugee Settlement Scheme

Australia is one of few countries in the world to provide a planned and managed program - Australia's Humanitarian Program - for refugees and other displaced people needing humanitarian resettlement.

The Australian Government, through the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA), provides a number of specialised services aimed at helping new Humanitarian Program arrivals settle in Australia quickly and effectively. (See Fact Sheet 43 Settlement Assistance for Refugee and Humanitarian Program Entrants).

One of those programs is the Community Refugee Settlement Scheme. The CRSS aims to:

- help those arriving in Australia under the Humanitarian Program who are particularly disadvantaged and who would benefit from personalised settlement support;
• provide the community with an opportunity to be directly involved with the settlement of Humanitarian Program arrivals, and to contribute to their successful settlement; and

• encourage greater community awareness of Australia’s Humanitarian Program.

There are some 250 groups in the Scheme, and in 1997-98 they assisted around 3,220 new arrivals, at a cost of approximately $1.9 million. From late 1979 - the time of the first CRSS arrivals - to the end of June 1997, over 50,000 Humanitarian Program arrivals have been assisted under the Scheme.

DIMA is responsible for providing groups with training and information on the settlement of the CRSS migrants and for assessing and evaluating the effectiveness of the Scheme. Groups may also apply to DIMA for a grant to assist with expenses associated with settling people under the Scheme.

Providing the Service

DIMA officers overseas identify those Humanitarian Program applicants who are in need of CRSS support on arrival in Australia, and DIMA CRSS Coordinators arrange placement with a suitable CRSS group. CRSS groups are responsible for meeting the migrants on arrival at the airport and assisting them for their first six months in Australia. This assistance includes:

• arranging sole-occupancy accommodation in a house or unit (of at least average local standard) which is close to public transport and settlement services and where the arrivals can be visited regularly;

• ensuring the arrivals have information about, and know how to find all relevant services in the community, such as health and welfare, education, transport, job placement services, information and recreation;
• encouraging the arrivals to learn English and about living in Australia, either by attending English language and orientation courses (where these are available) or by undertaking other English language tuition; and
• generally helping them to adjust to living in Australia.

Selecting a CRSS Group

To be admitted to DIMA's CRSS register, community groups are assessed against a range of factors known to be important in providing settlement assistance to Humanitarian Program migrants. These include the degree of support the group can offer, any experience of key individuals of the group in welfare or community work, ability to assist entrants to access general community and local welfare services and an appropriate level of financial and other resources.

The local area will also be assessed for availability and access to accommodation, English classes, employment opportunities and suitable education, health and welfare services. Important factors which make a successful CRSS group include:

• the size and stability of the group;
• previous history and character of the group’s members;
• the group’s previous experience or interest in community welfare work and/or its access to local welfare services; and
• sufficient time to make regular and frequent contact with new arrivals.

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Hayes and Winton (1991:32) have expanded the expectations of CRSS support groups to include:

- meeting the family at the airport if possible;
- arranging accommodation and providing a minimum amount of furniture;
- providing emergency clothing (this can be claimed from under the Clothing Reimbursement Scheme);
- helping with shopping;
- helping the refugees become familiar with the public transport system;
- registering at the Commonwealth Employment Service (CES);
- applying for Department of Social Security (DSS) income support;
- registering with Medicare;
- helping with opening a savings account at a bank;
- enrolling any children at school;
- enrolling adults with AMES for English classes;
- making enquiries about the recognition of qualifications;
- applying for government housing;
- providing personal and material support as needed.
APPENDIX 13

HEALTH CHECKS TO ENTER AUSTRALIA

DIMA Fact Sheet (DIMA, 1997d)
Australian Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs

DIMA Fact Sheet 22
Health Checks to Enter Australia

People who want to migrate to, or stay temporarily in Australia for longer than 12 months, must undergo health checks to ensure they meet Australia’s health standards. All immediate family members of any applicant, including dependent family members who do not intend to migrate, must be assessed against the health requirement.

People applying for visas to stay less than 12 months may be required to undergo a medical, and/or X-rays where it is thought their health is of special significance to their work or lifestyle. This includes where it is known they will be in a classroom situation, involved in health care (including in a hospital environment), food processing, catering, hospitality or pharmaceutical industries; or where there are other indications they may not meet the health requirement.

About the Requirements

The health requirement - which is defined in Australia’s Migration Regulations - is set by the Australian Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs on advice from the Australian Department of Health and Aged Care.

In line with Australia’s global non-discriminatory immigration policy, the health requirement applies equally to applicants from all countries. If an applicant cannot meet the health requirement, then under the Migration Regulations, the visa application must be refused, except in certain circumstances (see "Waivers" below).
The health checks are generally carried out in the country in which the applicant lives, by doctors and radiologists who are approved by the Australian Government. These medical practitioners are called panel doctors and their details are provided to applicants by the Australian visa office processing the application.

The health requirement is designed to ensure:

- risks to public health and safety in the Australian community are minimised;
- public expenditure on health and community services is contained; and
- Australian residents have access to health and other community services.

Health screening includes a physical examination, an x-ray, and blood and urine tests for some or all of a family and possibly further investigation.

**Tuberculosis**

Tuberculosis (TB) is an infectious public health risk and is occurring in epidemic levels globally, according to the World Health Organisation. All permanent and some temporary entry applicants 16 years of age or over must have a radiological examination to test for TB. Those under 16 years have a radiological examination if they are suspected of having TB, or have a history of contact with a person with TB.

Where x-rays show possible evidence of TB, applicants are requested to undergo more specific tests to establish whether or not TB is active. Before the health requirement can be met, those found to have active or untreated TB undergo a course of treatment, followed by further tests to confirm that the disease has been adequately treated.

Applicants whose TB has been treated, as well as those who show evidence of previous but now non-active TB, are required to sign a Health Undertaking. In doing so, they agree to contact the Health Undertaking Service on a free call number, and to report to the State or Territory health authority to which they have been referred for follow-up monitoring after arrival in Australia.

In 1998-99, 10 317 people granted an Australian visa were required to sign a Health Undertaking. This is a fall from 12 639 in 1997-98.

**Hepatitis B**

Although the risk of Hepatitis B transmission from newly-arrived migrants is considered by health authorities to be low, screening is mandatory where the applicant is:

- pregnant;
- a child for adoption; or
- an unaccompanied minor refugee child.

For other applicants, examining doctors may seek a test for Hepatitis B if they consider it justified on clinical grounds. Applicants who test positive for Hepatitis B are not normally rejected, but in most cases are asked to report to the Health Undertaking Service for referral to State or Territory health authorities on their arrival in Australia.
HIV/AIDS

HIV/AIDS testing was introduced on 19 December 1989 for all migrants who are 15 years or older. Applicants under 15 years must also be tested if they are being adopted, have a history of blood transfusions, or have other clinical indications.

The Decision Process

The health checks can be expensive and complex and are taken very seriously. Generally, the DIMA processing officer will ensure that the applicant has first met the other relevant entry criteria, and then request the applicant to start their health checks. In some instances, nevertheless (particularly in Australia), applicants may undertake health processing before lodging an application. The final decision to approve an application is not taken until the results of the health checks are received at the processing office. They may have been referred to a Medical Officer of the Commonwealth, (MOC) in Australia for further advice. The processing officer is required by law to take account of the MOC’s opinion on whether an applicant meets the health requirement. The MOC opinion is based on the results of the medical and radiological examinations, which include an applicant’s medical history, age, period of intended stay in Australia and any other relevant considerations.

Provided the applicant does not pose a public health or safety risk, the basis for decisions is the potential cost and impact on the Australian community resulting from the possible use of medical and related services. Australia’s comprehensive medical system has been developed to a high standard for all Australians. Medicare provisions apply to all Australian citizens and residents in need and it is not possible to ‘opt out’ of the Medicare system. In assessing cost, the MOC takes into account the applicant’s likely need for medical, and pharmaceutical and community services including assisted accommodation, home and community care, special education and income support such as Special Benefit, Disability Support Pension and Carer’s Pension. These costs can amount to more than $2 million for one person.

Although a person may not intend to make use of these benefits, the MOC cannot by law take this intention into account. This is because of the difficulties in withholding entitlements common to all Australians. An estimated cost of $16 000 or more (in 1999) is considered significant and results in an applicant being found to not meet the health requirement. (This figure equates to 150 per cent of the average per capita costs for similar services for Australians over a five-year period).

Waivers

The Migration Regulations allow for consideration of a waiver of the health requirement for some close family members or for humanitarian applicants (such as refugees), in situations where the applicant does not represent a risk to public health or safety in Australia. The waiver consideration focuses on whether the applicant is likely to represent an undue cost to the Australian community, and whether they would unduly
prejudice the access of Australians to medical and related services, with specially compelling circumstances taken into account.

Note: Overseas students should refer to Fact Sheet 56, Overseas Students in Australia for information on their health requirements.

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Last update: 13 September 1999.
**APPENDIX 14**

**ENGLISH LANGUAGE TUITION FOR ADULT MIGRANTS**

DIMA Fact Sheet (DIMA, 1997c)
Australian Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs

**DIMA Fact Sheet 71**
**English Language Tuition for Adult Migrants**

English language tuition for adult migrants is provided by the Australian Government to help newly arrived migrants and refugees from non-English speaking backgrounds settle successfully in Australia. The tuition is administered by DIMA through the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) and is available to adult migrants for whom English is not the first language, and who have been assessed by the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA) as not having functional English language skills (i.e., the basic English skills needed to settle satisfactorily in Australia).

**Adult Migrant English Program**

DIMA funds organisations in each State and Territory to provide tuition through the AMEP. In 1998-99, 35,000 clients drawn from 93 language backgrounds were assisted by the AMEP; a total of 6.9 million hours of adult ESL tuition were provided at a cost of $84m.

An additional $17.7m was allocated to the AMEP in the 1996-97 Budget to fund, over a period of four years, special preparatory programs for humanitarian entrants and to enhance the Home Tutor Scheme.

AMEP clients may choose from a range of learning options:
- full or part-time classroom tuition in formal or community-based settings designed to meet diverse needs, educational backgrounds and learning abilities;
• a distance learning course, available throughout Australia and comprising
texts, audio and video tapes, backed by regular telephone contact with a
qualified teacher;
• the Home Tutor Scheme, which provides language assistance by a trained
volunteer, usually on a one-to-one basis in a client’s home; and
• individual learning through self-paced learning in Individual Learning
Centres.
Distance learning and the Home Tutor Scheme are available to clients who cannot
attend formal classes because of class location or timing, or for personal, cultural,
work-related or other reasons.

Eligibility
The AMEP is available to:
• newly-arrived migrants and humanitarian entrants from overseas; and
• people already in Australia who are changing from temporary to permanent
resident status who are assessed as not having functional English.
Clients are entitled to 510 hours of tuition, or the number of hours it takes to reach
functional English, whichever comes first. In some circumstances, additional tuition
may be provided.
Clients need to register for their entitlement within three months of arrival or grant
of permanent residence, start tuition within one year, and complete tuition within
three years. Deferrals may be authorised in some circumstances.

English Language Assessment
To assess the English language ability of a prospective migrant, the Department may
ask applicants to sit an English test. The International English Language Testing
System test - known as the IELTS test - is the preferred test for migration purposes
and is available worldwide.
For some health professionals, there is an occupation-specific test, the Occupational
English Test. This is administered by Language Australia. Test results are used for a
number of purposes - for example, to decide:
• whether applicants have functional English proficiency;#
• whether Skilled-Independent, Skilled-Australian-Sponsored and Skilled
Matching applicants have vocational English proficiency; and
• the level of points for language skills to be awarded in the Skilled-
Independent and Skilled-Australian-sponsored categories.
# Applicants without functional English are required to pay a charge before their
visa can be granted. This charge is payable as a second instalment of the Visa
Application Charge.
Other English Tuition

The Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA) provides English language tuition through the Advanced English for Migrants Program (AEMP). Migrants can obtain information about this program from the nearest Centrelink office.

Charges

Information on charges can be obtained from the Department's information form 990i* entitled Charges or by telephoning the Department’s inquiry line on 131 881.

The Department operates a national telephone inquiry line on 131 881, for the cost of a local call anywhere in Australia. Overseas, please contact your nearest Australian diplomatic office.

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Last update: 24 November 1999 Disclaimer.
The offshore resettlement component of Australia’s Humanitarian Program is one element of the Australian Government’s approach to assisting people affected by international humanitarian crises, which also involves the provision of aid, diplomatic initiatives and peacekeeping.

The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) is the international organization charged with the responsibility to work with States in providing international protection to refugees under the auspices of the UN.

In the past 50 years, almost 600,000 refugees and displaced people have been resettled in Australia. Many accepted for resettlement have close family ties to Australia.
**Background**

The primary responsibility for the protection of an individual lies with that individual’s country of nationality. Where the country of nationality is not able or is unwilling to provide that protection, the system of international protection is activated.

The international protection framework is the reflection of governments’ acceptance of cooperative responsibility for resolving refugee problems. This is commonly referred to as international solidarity or burden-sharing (see Fact Sheet 46, *Australia’s International Protection Obligations* for further details).

In line with the principle of burden-sharing, the Australian Government is strongly committed to helping refugees and people who have faced serious abuses of their human rights.

**First Asylum**

First asylum is normally provided by the closest safe country from that which the refugee has fled. This then allows for the preferred durable solution of return in safety and dignity as soon as possible.

It is in that context, and in response to UNHCR’s request to assist in the humanitarian temporary evacuation of Kosovars, that Australia provided Safe Haven to Kosovars and East Timorese (see Fact Sheet 62, *Operation Safe Haven - Kosovars*).

**Durable Solutions**

The preferred durable solutions for refugees are:

- repatriation as soon as possible in conditions of safety and dignity; or
- integration in the country of first asylum (see Fact Sheet 41, Seeking asylum in Australia); or
• if the other options cannot be secured, resettlement in a third country.

The overseas component of Australia’s Humanitarian Program - the resettlement program - assists in meeting the needs of people for whom resettlement is the only durable solution.

Australia’s Offshore Resettlement Program

Australia’s offshore humanitarian resettlement program comprises:

**Refugee category:** for people who are subject to persecution and have been identified in conjunction with UNHCR as in need of resettlement. This category includes the Woman at Risk program;

**Special Humanitarian Program (SHP):** for people who have suffered discrimination amounting to gross violation of human rights, and who have strong support from an Australian citizen or resident or a community group in Australia;

**Special Assistance Category (SAC):** for people who, while not meeting the refugee or Special Humanitarian criteria, are nonetheless in situations of discrimination, displacement or hardship. Most SACs require proposers of applicants to be close family members resident in Australia.

The Resettlement Program is non-discriminatory and helps people in need from all parts of the world. The size and composition of the Resettlement Program are influenced by a number of factors. These include:

• an estimate of the number of people likely to be found to be in need of protection in Australia in accordance with international obligations under the UN Refugees Convention;

• assessments of the resettlement needs of refugees overseas by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR);
the views of individuals and organizations in Australia conveyed during community consultations by the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, and

Australia’s capacity to assist.

1999-2000 Program Composition

On 29 April 1999, the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs announced that the overall size and composition of the 1999-2000 Humanitarian Program would remain at 12,000 places, the same number as in 1998-99.

The Program comprises notionally 10,000 resettlement places for people from overseas (4,000 Refugees; 4,300 Special Humanitarian Program (SHP); 900 Special Assistance Category (SAC); and 2,000 places for people already in Australia who are found to need protection in the Onshore Protection Program.

Some 800 places from the resettlement program have not yet been allocated for the 1999-2000 program year. Unused places may also be moved between onshore and offshore components according to need. If more than 2,000 places are required onshore they are taken off the Resettlement Program, and if less than 2,000 places are required in the Onshore Protection Program, they will be used in the Resettlement Program.

To ensure the focus continues to be on helping victims of human rights abuses who may not have any other option than to be resettled, there will be greater flexibility in how program places are managed.

This will involve rolling over unused places into the next program year or bringing places forward from future programs for use in addition to the annual allocation. It also includes places for those who were granted visas but did not arrive in Australia.

For the 1999-2000 program year, 842 places that were not used during the last program year are available. These places, together with the 800 places not yet allocated, will be kept for unexpected contingencies during the year. This ensures all program
places are utilised and gives the Government a greater flexibility in responding to emerging humanitarian crises.

**Regional Focus**

The focus of the resettlement Program will be the regions of the former Yugoslavia, the Middle East and Africa. (see table for details). Priority has been given to refugees and those in humanitarian need from these regions since 1991.

In the 1998-99 program year, almost half of all visas granted under the offshore component of the Humanitarian Program went to people from the countries of former Yugoslavia. There is also a sizeable intake from the Middle East, particularly from Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan. Thirty percent of all Humanitarian Program visas were granted in the Middle East in 1998-99.

The main African nationalities resettled under the program in 1998-99 were Sudanese and Somalis, followed by Ethiopians and Eritreans. In all, 16 percent of Humanitarian Program visas were granted to people from Africa. Under the 1999-2000 program year, people from Sierra Leone will also be resettled in Australia.

**Family Reunion**

The Humanitarian Program allows holders of humanitarian visas granted overseas or permanent protection visas granted within Australia to support the applications of immediate family members to enter Australia. (‘Immediate family’ is defined as ‘spouse’, ‘dependent child’ or ‘parents of dependent child under 18’).

To be eligible, the immediate family relationship must have been declared to the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, by proposers before they were granted their visas, and a time limit applies to applications.
Settlement

Specialised settlement assistance programs are available to assist Humanitarian Program entrants and those asylum seekers granted protection visas to settle into the Australian community. Details are contained in Fact Sheet 43, *Settlement Assistance for Refugees and Humanitarian Program Entrants* and Fact Sheet 44, *The Community Refugee Settlement Scheme*.

### Details of the Overseas Component of the 1998-99 Humanitarian Program

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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Refugee/Special Humanitarian/ Special Assistance Category</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>1,240</td>
<td>1,473</td>
<td>1,552</td>
<td>1,700</td>
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<tr>
<td>Americas</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>30</td>
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<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>1,669</td>
<td>685</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>180</td>
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<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>4,236</td>
<td>5,307</td>
<td>4,736</td>
<td>4,400</td>
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<td>Middle East and South-West Asia</td>
<td>2,425</td>
<td>2,952</td>
<td>2,919</td>
<td>2,890</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unallocated</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>800^</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>9,652</td>
<td>10,467</td>
<td>9,526</td>
<td>10,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
These figures are subject to change depending on demand for Program places.

In addition, there are 841 places available which were not used in 1998-99 that have not been allocated.

### Humanitarian Program Outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Refugee</td>
<td>3,334</td>
<td>4,010</td>
<td>3,988</td>
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<tr>
<td>Special Humanitarian</td>
<td>2,583</td>
<td>4,636</td>
<td>4,348</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Assistance</td>
<td>3,735</td>
<td>1,821</td>
<td>1,190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Onshore refugee</td>
<td>2,251</td>
<td>1,588</td>
<td>1,834</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total program</td>
<td>11,903</td>
<td>12,055</td>
<td>11,360</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Department operates a national telephone inquiry line on 131 881, for the cost of a local call anywhere in Australia. Overseas, please contact your nearest Australian diplomatic office.

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UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES

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