

REFUGEES: ACHIEVEMENT AND CONFLICT

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Currently, there are more than 30 million refugees and internally displaced people in the world. Since the 1970s, after the Vietnam War, international organizations and many countries have supported refugees financially, however, they all have different definitions for a refugee. Refugees who desire peace or freedom and resettle in new countries have had remarkable economic, social, and educational achievement, especially Indochinese people in the US. However, refugees who flee from conflicts have often faced new conflicts in their host society. Both refugees and the host countries experience economic and social burden, however, refugees struggle and try to escape from their economic dependency from the local government. If refugee achievements continue, they could exceed the US educational and social norm in the future.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter		Page
1. INTRODUCTION		1
2. DEFINITIONS		5
3. REFUGEE PROFILES		9
US Updates		
Vietnam		
4. REFUGEE ACHIEVEMENT AND CONFLICT		14
Achievement		
Conflict		
5. CONCLUSION		22
REFERENCES		24

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

For the past several years, ethnic conflict has been the world's most common violent act and a major cause of refugees and internally displaced people. Refugees seek a safe place or country, in which to support their resettlement. Ethnic conflict has occurred between or among groups who have different culture, region, physical features, or language. Ethnic conflicts usually involve citizens of nations who are non-combatants in the conflict.

Safety and opportunity are primary goals of all refugees. Recently, the United States Committee for Refugees (USCR) reported that there are more than 13.5 million refugees and more than 17 million internally displaced persons worldwide. Refugees leave their own countries and seek better lives, safety, or freedom in another country even though the country has different food, language, and culture. Where do they come from? How do they become refugees? How do they adapt to the new environment? What problems do refugees bring to their host countries?

The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) reports that the United States authorized the admission of 78,000 refugees for fiscal year 1999. Although many people

are resettled directly from their country of origin, they are not considered refugees but immigrants under the UNHCR mandate. The Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) received 41,377 applications for asylum during 1999, continuing a trend of falling numbers of asylum applications that began in 1996. The UNHCR explains this fact because of special programs such as the Nicaraguan and Central American Relief Act of 1997 (NACARA) and the Haitian Refugee Immigration Fairness Act of 1998 (HRIFA). The asylum cases of Salvadorans, Guatemalans, and Haitians approved for resident status under these special programs will be closed before any decision is reached on the application. Under NACARA, emigrees from Salvador, Guatemala, and former Soviet Bloc nations could apply for suspension of deportation or cancellation of removal. Under HRIFA, some Haitians who fled during the political violence in the early 1990s are able to become legal permanent residents of the US. Unaccompanied, orphaned, and abandoned children are also admitted as US residents. Moreover, the refugees from the former Soviet Union (16,922), the second largest group to be resettled, have declined each year since 1992 (USCR, 1999).

Refugees and immigrants have different circumstances and backgrounds, but they have similar effects on the host country. Currently, about one million newcomers are coming to the US annually. Immigration, both legal and illegal, has been a constant political issue in the US since the late

nineteenth century. Some think that while illegal migration is especially burdensome, the problem is not undocumented immigration alone (Reimers 1998). Legal migration is estimated to be three times the illegal flow, and for some people who are unemployed or in direct competition with refugees within business, legal migration is itself a problem. The UNHCR reports that newcomers are a net benefit to the US, economically as well as socially; however, it does not affect all nations equally, which might bring racism and misunderstanding between newcomers and the host society.

European countries experienced substantial problems with refugee's adapting to society. The increasing number of refugees from Africa, Asia, and South America has become a source of political controversy, especially in Germany, France, and United Kingdom (Bloch and Levy, 1999). Levy (1999) identified refugees entering Europe from 1945 to 1989. The majority of groups were from Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union, and South East Asia. In the 1990s, a large expansion in this number of refugees was explained by ex-Yugoslavs fleeing civil war. The fear of floods of Russian, Algerian, Albanian or Bosnian refugees have forced the European Union to establish a common policy on refugees and asylum seekers.

Before the 1970s, most refugees in Europe were inter-European. However, in the 1970s, large numbers of refugees

and asylum seekers fled from Africa, Asia, and Latin America to Europe. At that time, labor shortages in major western European nations provided job opportunities for those new arrivals, and western Europeans by and large approved of the admission of new refugee workers.

This paper examines refugee achievement in their host nations focusing on Indochinese refugees in the U.S. and Japan. The following chapter considers difficulties in examining refugee issues due to differing definitions of refugee employed by various government and international agencies.

CHAPTER 2

DEFINITIONS

Who are 'refugees'? What is the difference between a refugee and an immigrant? The UN Refugee Convention in 1951, defined refugees as people who are outside of their own country and unable to return to it because they have a strong fear of persecution. However, according to UNHCR working paper in 1999, in developing countries in Africa, Central and South America, and South East Asia the concept of refugees has been formally broadened to include people who have sought refuge in other countries as a result of aggression, occupation, generalized violence and events seriously disturbing public order. These different definitions and interpretations cause problems in that a person who would be approved as a refugee in one country might not qualify for that status in another country.

The UNHCR suggests that one significant difference between refugees and immigrants is that refugees are immediately confronted with different customs, weather, language, and food with little time to prepare for these changes. Immigrants, however, have a head start over refugees during the integration process. Immigrants are more in control of their destinies and they exercise this by choosing to leave their homeland, no matter how narrow the

range of choices. For refugees, the elements of control and choice are practically absent. Collinson (1993) offered two major differences between refugees and immigrants: political versus economic and voluntary versus involuntary. Also, Bloch (1999) emphasizes that refugees are involuntary migrants; they did not want to leave their country of origin.

A characteristic of refugees in refugee research by USCR was defined as "their inability to repatriate due to continued fear of persecution in their homelands and the absence of permanent settlement opportunities in their countries of asylum or elsewhere" (3, 1999).

Crisp (1999) pointed out an example, which was caused by definitional differences in the UNHCR refugee research. While the USCR includes in its global refugee statistics the three million Palestinians who are registered with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), UNHCR does not include this group of refugees as they fall outside of the agency's mandate. UNHCR indicates that scholars and journalists who make use of the USCR and UNHCR figures almost invariably fail to recognize these important definitional differences. Many commentators, especially those in the mainstream press, use the word 'refugee' for people who have been forced to leave their living place, whether or not they have crossed an international border. Media reports frequently refer to

the large number of 'refugees' living in countries such as Afghanistan, Angola, Somalia, and Sudan when they are actually referring to internally displaced people.

It is hard to characterize internally displaced populations. Unlike the refugee concept, an 'internally displaced person' has never been defined by international law. Many organizations and groups have tried to make reference to internally displaced people statistics in their reports, but UNHCR says that the questions are usually difficult to answer. For example, how far a person should go to be considered 'internally' displaced? When can internally displaced people achieve a standard of physical and economic security in the new place? How can they be differentiated from an immigrant when many internally displaced people are settled in towns and cities? Also, how are people who are involved in armed conflicts and are besieged in their own countries distinguished?

These problems of definition and categorization also occur in situations where refugees are mixed with other groups of displaced persons or migrants. Even in conventional refugee situations, different refugee definitions may be given depending on the source of data and their means of calculation. Governments may provide different refugee data from the UNHCR reports. One statistic may refer to the number of people who are supposed to be receiving assistance from the international community,

while another statistic may refer to the number of people who are actually receiving such assistance.

CHAPTER 3

REFUGEE PROFILES

US Profiles

The US has taken the lead in dealing with refugees in the last thirty years. The US has resettled more refugees and contributed more money to refugee relief than any other country. A speech by Abramowitz, President of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace delivered to the Fourth Annual Franklin and Eleanor Distinguished Lecture in Chicago on November 21st, 1995, suggested that the resettlement of a million Indochinese refugees in the US during the decade following the Vietnam War probably marked the last time the US will readily open itself to refugees on a large scale. Abramowitz explains that the Vietnamese refugees in the 70s and 80s were a unique and tragic case and the US government would not allow to resettle such a large number of refugees over the next decade.

President Clinton signed a presidential determination in September 1999 authorizing the admission of up to 90,000 refugees in Fiscal Year 2000. The determination allows the State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) to admit up to 18,000 refugees from Africa, 8,000 from East Asia, 17,000 from the former Yugoslavia

(mostly Bosnians who have already been processed to come to the United States), 10,000 Kosovo affected persons, 20,000 from the Newly Independent States and the Baltics (the former Soviet Union), 3,000 from Latin America and the Caribbean, and 8,000 from the Near East and South Asia. It also includes 6,000 unallocated admissions spaces, up from last year's reserve of 2,000 to be allocated as needed (USCR, 1999).

Since the 1980s, the US has taken about 100,000 refugees per year, many of whom are not counted as refugees by the United Nations. Abramowitz (1995) says that domestic political considerations are the principal basis for choosing who are admitted as refugees.

Although the USCR also reported that the FY 2000 ceiling of 90,000 appears to be an increase of 12,000 from the initial (pre-Kosovo crisis) FY 1999 ceiling of 78,000, these numbers are misleading. The administration adjusted Kosovar refugees down to 13,000 later, but the administration initially set the ceiling at 20,000 for Kosovar refugees in the FY 1999. The PRM finally admitted 85,006 refugees in FY 1999. Of these, 14,156 were from Kosovo and about 71,000 were from other countries. It was 7,000 less than the initial FY 1999 ceiling of 78,000.

The Clinton Administration has also increased funding by about \$20 million for refugee programs in the FY 2000 Budget. These programs provide financial support to

refugees overseas and resettlement to the 60,000 to 80,000 qualifying persons in the US.

Vietnam

Since mid 1970s, many Vietnamese people have fled in rickety boats, braving sharks and pirates, to reach the shores of Hong Kong, Thailand, the Philippines, Singapore, Indonesia and Malaysia. The first wave of boat people was southerners that fled political persecution after the defeat of Saigon in 1975. This outflow reached a peak, about 125,000 in 1978. The second wave began in the late 1970s and included mainly northerners fleeing economic hardship.

In June 1988, the UNHCR and Hong Kong immigration authorities took action to screen boat people to distinguish economic migrants from political refugees (Balfour, 1993). In the last twenty years, approximately 400,000 Vietnamese were 'processed' in the Philippines. Of these, 327,000, including 44,000 boat people and 6,000 Vietnamese who arrived via Hong Kong, were in the US Orderly Departure Program (ODP). The ODP was established in 1979 as an agreement between UNHCR and the Hanoi government to support boat people. People who were former South Vietnamese soldiers in prison or reeducation camps and their families were screened and approved by US officials in Vietnam for resettlement in the US. By 1989, 165,000 Vietnamese had been accepted to the program, and by mid-1990s, the number had increased to over 200,000. About 373,000 Vietnamese

resettled in other countries. The remainder who were not accepted as refugees in one of the participating nations had to decide whether to go back to their home country voluntarily or stay in camps.

Asian countries, with the exception of Japan, refused to accept permanent Vietnamese refugees, many of whom eventually relocated to Western countries. In 1989, more than 32,000 boat people decided to return to Vietnam, with the majority, 26,000, from Hong Kong. China had pressured Britain to empty refugee camps in Hong Kong before turning the territory back over to China.

For the UNHCR, the largest task was to encourage people who were not accepted as a refugee and did not want to leave the camps. The UNHCR provided returnees a free flight and US\$410 in cash assistance. By 1993, the UNHCR had spent more than US\$21 million and generated about 11,000 jobs, of which 48 percent had gone to returnees. The funds included job training programs, health services, and an individual credit scheme. Returnees with loans operated their own businesses and made loan payments monthly. Because of such international efforts for returnees, Vietnam's economic climate has stabilized. The money the returnees got from the UNHCR for agreeing to go back was enough to make them relatively affluent in a country where the average income was US\$200 a year. After world attention moved to Somalia and Yugoslavia, boat people were yesterday's story and

financial support for Vietnamese refugees were cut in the early 1990s (Balfoure, 1993). UNHCR reported that about 110,000 boat people have returned to Vietnam by March 1999. In 1999, UNHCR staff reported that the returnees have not been discriminated against or persecuted by Vietnamese authorities.

CHAPTER 4
REFUGEE ACHIEVEMENT AND CONFLICT

Refugee Achievement

This section focuses on refugees' economic, educational, and social achievements in the U.S. Economic self-sufficiency, which strongly affects social achievement, was assessed by refugees' labor force participation and their income sources. Educational achievement of refugee children was measured by standardized achievement test results.

A survey by Caplan, Whitmore, and Choy (1989) sought to assess the economic progress of Indochinese refugees; mostly Chinese, Laotians, and Vietnamese. Federal, state, and local government sources were used to obtain a sampling frame of Indochinese refugees. Incomplete administrative lists presented problems on sample selection partially overcome. The researchers prepared the questionnaires in three languages and seventy-five bilingual and trilingual interviewers. According to the survey, 44 percent of the adults in the sample were in the labor force, with 1,050 people having at least one job and 773 people being unemployed but seeking work. Thus, more than half (58 percent) of all adults in the labor force hold jobs and the unemployment rate was 42 percent. However, the figure

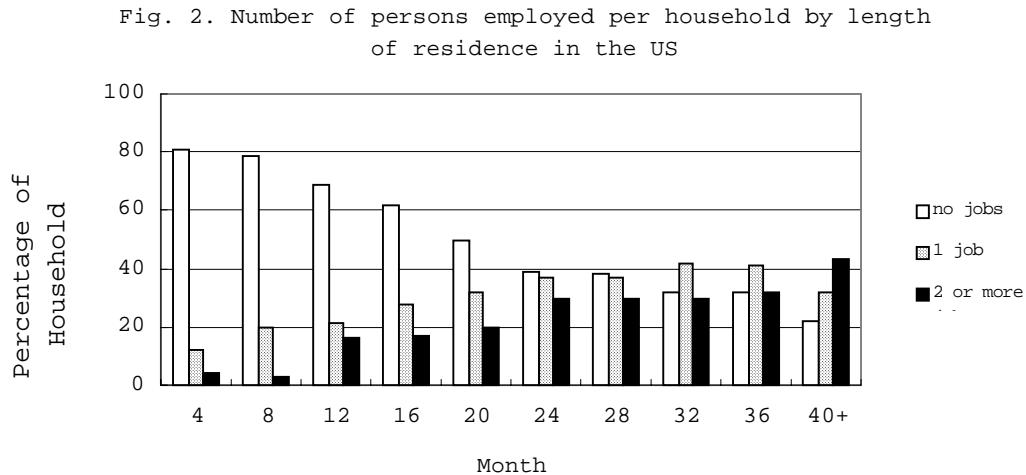
includes all refugees, some of whom had just arrived to the US. Caplan, et al say the best understanding of the unemployment rate is gained by looking at work-force participation by arrival time in the US.



Fig. 1 shows that the unemployment rate decreases about 60 percent from the first month of their arrival to the US to three years or more their resettlement (Caplan, Whitmore, and Choy, 1989).

Villalobos (1985) found similar results of a survey of the unemployment status of three refugee groups—Vietnamese, Chinese Vietnamese, and Laotians. He found that 90 percent were unemployed in the first few months of resettlement, while 35 percent of that group were unemployed after three

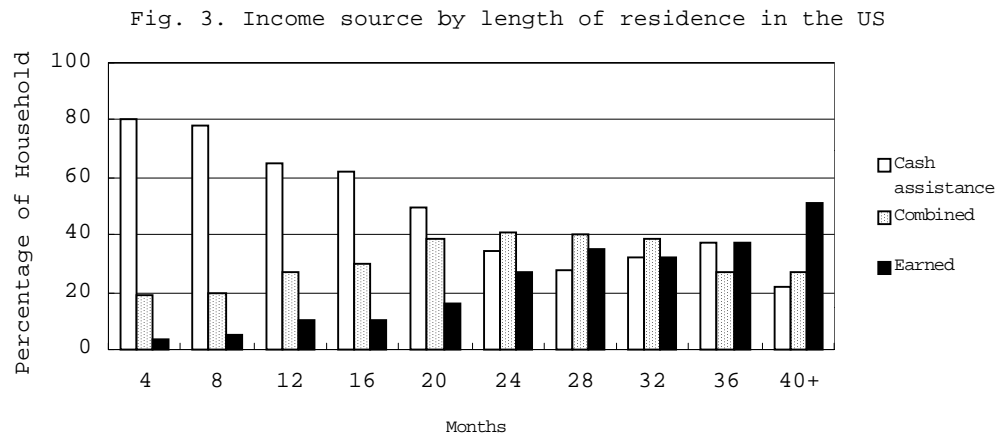
years. The key to economic self-sufficiency was English proficiency at the time of arrival (Villalobos, 1985).



Source: Caplan, Nathan, Whitmore, John K, and Choy, Marcella H. *The Boat People and Achievement in America*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1989

Fig. 2 shows the changes of their household. The author mentions that what is impressive is the improvement in the economic position by the effort of more than one person per household entering the labor force (Caplan, Whitmore, and Choy, 1989). By 1990, the median household income of the Vietnamese was \$29,772, more than double what it had been the previous decade. Despite significant improvements, however, the Vietnamese were still behind their American counterparts economically (Zhou and Bankston, 2000). Moreover, the percentage of households on cash assistance from local government sharply drops from more than 90 percent to about 45 percent during the forty-month

period. This study found that one third of the households in the sample relied on both earnings and transfer sources of income (Caplan, 1989).



Source: Caplan, Nathan, Whitmore, John K, and Choy, Marcella H.
The Boat People and Achievement in America. Ann Arbor: The
University Michigan Press, 1989

Fig. 3 details refugee income sources. Caplan, Whitmore, and Choy (1989) attempted to see refugees' dependency and independency over forty months. These findings suggest that the movement toward economic independence is much more apparent by focusing on household income source over time, instead of individual income.

Data from the California Achievement Test (CAT) allowed Caplan, Whitmore, and Choy to go beyond the limits of GPA comparison and to see how well these refugee children were doing at the same grade levels. Each state has its own standardized achievement test, such as the Texas Achievement

Test or Iowa Achievement Test. The researchers examined the collected scores, and they concluded the results were similar. Caplan, Whitmore, and Choy (1989) reported only the CAT results because it was the most widely used of such tests across the five states. The results showed that the refugee children performed as well as or better than the national average. Scores included testing in math, language and reading, and spelling.

Caplan, Whitmore, and Choy's study (1989) was based on 1984 scores. The lowest test scores of the refugee children were in language and reading. However, the authors say that the result was not unexpected. These children had been in the US for an average of only about three and a half years and that most came from homes where no one in the household was able to speak any English upon arrival in the US. Moreover, these researchers concluded that the mean language and reading score of the refugee children was at 46th percentile, or only slightly below the national average.

A study by Zhou and Bankston (2000) found that parental education and family socioeconomic status are strong predictors of residential location and school performance.

Table 1. Educational and Socioeconomic Characteristics of Households with Vietnamese Children (by Generation), Black Children, and White Children, 1990					
Characteristics	Vietnamese			Black (%)	White (%)
	First Generation (%)	1.5 Generation (%)	Second Generation (%)		
Household Head's Characteristics					
Does Not Speak English Very Well	58.9	56.7	32.9	-	-
College Graduate	8.0	9.9	18.1	9.4	25.7
Professional Occupation	6.3	8.0	15.2	12.6	27.1
Unemployed	12.2	9.3	6.4	12.6	3.7
Family Economic Status					
Poverty	47.6	45.0	28.7	40.6	10.8
Home Ownership	18.2	28.5	31.7	38.7	74.1
Median Household Income	\$20,000	\$20,444	\$32,000	\$19,500	\$37,725

Source: US Bureau of the Census, 1992

Table 1 shows Vietnamese children; the first generation (arrived in the US as adolescents), 1.5 generation (arrived in the US as young children), and the second generation (born in the US). Zhou and Bankston explain that the second generation children achieved better educational results than the first and 1.5 generation, which is not because they were born in the US but because their parents had been in the US longer. However, they were still behind their white counterparts. Moreover, in the ten year period between 1980 and 1990, the proportion of college graduates among adults age 25 and over was 17 percent, up from 13 percent (Zhou and Bankston, 2000).

In 1998, Vietnamese children whose parents arrived in the US in 1976 were often both Valedictorian and

Salutatorian of the high school graduating class in Palacios, Texas (UN, 1998).

Conflict

Refugees' economic, social and educational achievement was not a simple and easy process. Strand and Jones (1985) identified language as the most difficult obstacle for refugees seeing to assimilate into their host nation. Conflicts between refugees and their host society have also been serious problems. A refugee from Vietnam in Palacios, Texas, located between Houston and Corpus Christi, was beaten to death by white. By the early 1980s, the Vietnamese in Palacios had saved enough to own small shrimp boats. The competition to fish brought new violence with refugees being physically attacked, and their gear and nets were often sabotaged (UN, 1998). Although refugees fled from conflict in their home country, there was always the possibility of conflict between the refugees and host society when it came to the issue of resettlement. The local host government pays close attention to how the new refugees affect their society, especially concerning economic impacts.

Problems experienced by Vietnamese refugees are not only in the US. Vietnamese refugees in Japan have also faced difficulties integrating into Japanese society. Vietnamese refugees first arrived in Japan in the late

1970s. However, since then they have continued to be isolated from Japanese society. Until early 1990s, there were no newspapers written in Vietnamese, and most of those Vietnamese refugees in Japan still cannot read either English or Japanese.

The Japanese Municipal Government, which has one of the largest numbers of Vietnamese refugees, explains that it takes too much time, money, and labor to produce media in other languages demonstrating a general lack of support. In 1992, volunteer groups in the US established nationwide networks to help refugees integrate, and Japanese government also offers financial support. A volunteer group in Tokyo has begun to publish a newspaper in Vietnamese (Nakamura, 1992).

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

At the international level, we have to agree on a universal definition of what is a refugee. Since countries screen people who claim to be a refugee more strictly than before, thousands of internally displaced people and asylum seekers have been produced. Abramowitz points out in his speech (1995) that since most asylum countries today are poor, and rich countries will not accept large number of refugees, voluntary repatriation must be at the forefront of reducing today's huge refugee populations. There are currently more than 13.5 million refugees and 17 million internally displaced persons worldwide. Kumin (1989) said many refugees are waiting for something: to have their status determined, to be resettled in another country, or to go back to their homeland.

The UNHCR points that many refugees are now concerned about losing their culture. When they arrive in a new country, they initially try to assimilate to the new culture, but after a period of time, they begin to revert to their own culture. Many babies are born in the new countries, grow up there, and do not know their parents' culture. According to Caplan, Whitmore, and Choy (1989), refugee parents have conflicting feelings that they want

their children to assimilate to new culture and master new language, at the same time, however, they want their children to learn and maintain their native culture too.

Both refugees and the host countries experience economic and social burdens. The UNHCR suggests that large ethnic refugee populations put heavy economic, social, and political stress on the host nation and may lead to xenophobia and ethnic conflict within the country like in Palacios, Texas. The burden can also give the host nation a stake in seeing the external conflict quickly resolved.

As long as there are conflicts in this world, there will be refugees. Refugees are seeking freedom and the opportunity to have peace in their new life, not financial support. Refugees on average try to avoid dependency on government support and attempt to develop their language ability, finding a job, and achieving higher education to improve their status in their new society by improving their language skills, finding a job, and pursuing education opportunities. There are remarkable refugee social and educational achievements in the US. Although the figures show that Indochinese refugees in the US are still behind their white counterparts, Zhou and Bankston conclude that refugees' upward trend will continue and eventually, they could surpass the US educational and social norm.

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