

The Amerasians from Vietnam: A California Study



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by Chung Hoang Chuong and Le Van

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

In late 1989, we attended a meeting in San Jose, California, with newly arrived Amerasians from Vietnam. We listened to their first impressions of America, their concerns for the future, and the daily problems, apprehension, and uncertainty they are facing. We were deeply moved by their personal stories. As the newest group of immigrants from Vietnam, little is known about their experiences and background. We felt that their voices should be heard. This study represents a modest attempt to present an overview of their experiences in Vietnam, the migration process, and their hopes and expectations for the future in the United States, the home of their fathers.

The Amerasian Project was started by me and three others: **Nguyen Kim-Lan**, a teacher in the Franklin-McKinley School District, **Philip T. Nguyen**, a social worker with the Santa Clara County Department of Social Services, and **Chung Hoang Chuong**, Assistant Professor of Asian American Studies at San Francisco State University. After the initial design of the study was established, Chung Hoang Chuong and I became the principal authors.

Interviewing the Amerasians with a questionnaire of forty-seven items is time-consuming work. Fortunately, my friends and colleagues, former faculty staff of the Universities of Hue and Saigon, and others who are teachers, school administrators, or social workers in California, along with colleagues since my arrival in the United States, volunteered to help us in that tremendous task. They are: **Dong Hau**, East Side Union High School District; **Francis Lam Le**, Newport-Mesa Unified School District; **Khamchong Luangpraseut**, Santa Ana Unified School District; **Nguyen Hue Khanh**, Huntington Beach Joint Union High School District; **Nguyen Huu Hung** and **Phan Nguyen Kim-Anh**, San Jose Unified School District; **Philip T. Nguyen**, Santa Clara County Department of

Social Services; **Nguyen Huu Phuoc**, Los Angeles County Department of Social Services; **Tran Hue**, Evergreen School District; **Tran Canh Xuan**, El Cajon School District; **Vo Minh-Van**, Orange Unified School District; **Vu Duc Chang**, Pasadena Unified School District; **Vu Minh Tran**, San Diego City Unified School District; and **Gay Wong**, Alhambra City School District.

Out-of-state educators also helped us to administer the questionnaire to Amerasian newcomers in their local areas: **Dam Trung Phap**, Dallas; **Dang Thong Nhat**, Minneapolis Public Schools; **Do The Vinh** and **Nguyen Kim Phuong**, Portland Public Schools; **Martin O'Gallaghan**, Seattle Public Schools; and **Truong Ngoc Thuy**, Boston Independent Public Schools. The results of their interviews will be used later on in a comparative study of Amerasians living in the states of California, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Oregon, Texas, and Washington.

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This book represents the work of many anonymous educators and social workers who volunteered to donate their time and effort to complete this study. Whatever shortcomings are found in this volume belong to the authors.

Van LE, Consultant
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June 1993

Contents

Chapter 1	
INTRODUCTION.....	1
Chapter 2	
HISTORICAL ANTECEDENTS.....	3
The Amerasian Situation in Vietnam	8
The Amerasian Homecoming Act.....	10
The Amerasian Transit Center.....	17
The Refugee Processing Center.....	23
The Amerasian Resettlement Program.....	25
Chapter 3	
LITERATURE REVIEW.....	29
Amerasians in Southeast Asian Refugee Literature	29
Studying Amerasians.....	30
Interracial Relationships.....	34
Chapter 4	
THE STUDY	37
Background of the Study.....	38
Amerasians: Working Definitions.....	39
Research Method.....	41
The Research Sample	46
Some Limitations	47
Chapter 5	
THE DATA	48
General Profile	48
Gender and Racial Breakdown.....	49
Age Breakdown	49
Birthplace Characteristics.....	50
Recollections of Fathers	51
Concentrations in Vietnam.....	52
Years of Arrival.....	53
Sponsoring Agencies.....	53
Amerasian Concentrations in California	54
Pre-Migration Experience	55
English Language Skills.....	55
Education in Vietnam.....	56
Family Composition in Vietnam	58
Migration Experience	58
Paper Parents and Golden Children.....	58
Waiting for the Exit Visa.....	60
Family Composition at Arrival.....	60
Expectations at Arrival.....	61

The Stay in the Camp	61
Impressions: Training Program	62
America: First Impressions	62
Feeling Nostalgic.....	63
Present Educational Situation.....	64
Another Layer of Support.....	65
Initial Adjustment Problems.....	65
Community Attitude and Reaction.....	66
Tracing American Fathers	67
Reactions to Father’s Responses	69
Future Plans.....	69
 Chapter 6	
DATA ANALYSIS	71
The Typical Amerasian	71
Living in the Shadows: Mother	72
The Afro-Amerasians	74
Amerasian Resiliency: Survivors	75
 Chapter 7	
CONCLUSION	76
 BIBLIOGRAPHY	81
 OTHER INFORMATION AND RESOURCES.....	86
Agencies	86
Inquiries on Specific Amerasian Cases	86
Training Program for Amerasians.....	87
Questions about Tracing.....	87
Published Materials on Amerasians	88
Amerasian Cluster Centers & Lead Agencies.....	88
 FIGURES, TABLES AND ILLUSTRATIONS	
Cover: Amerasian boy at the Philippine Refugee Processing Center, waiting for permission to come to the land of his father	4
Map of Vietnam.....	4
Photo: Mary Xinh Nguyen	7
Photo: The author, refugee artist, and a counselor at the Philippine Processing Center (July 1992)	20
Photo:A fun moment in Bataan (July 1992).....	21
Photo: Keeping busy, Vanh Hanh Pagoda, Philippine Refugee Processing Center (July 1992).....	22
Photo: PRPC staff relaxing during the weekend break at Bataan (July 1992).....	22
Photo: The outdoor café in Bataan, Philippine Refugee Processing Center (July 1992).....	23
Back cover: Amerasian boy with others of his village	
Table 1. Racial breakdown	48
Table 2. Gender and age.....	49

Table 3. Years of arrival.....	52
Table 4. Sponsors	53
Table 5. English speaking skills	55
Table 6. Prior education	56

Vietnam—14 Years Later

To the Vietnam I will never forget

Years have passed
Memories of you are dimmed
Happiness and fear
buried in my heart, head
remembrances of you
are of smiles through tears
Still I never thought
a day of my return
leaving you years before
in violence, hysterics

You've aged, my mother
You've dried and withered
you seem uncertain, sad
Your offsprings have uprooted
to find new soil—abandonment
I feel in your presence

Your charm and beauty you
still possess—your culture
carved in your soul as expressed
in your children's paintings
Your countryside green—endless
Oceans so blue—life swimming in
its vastness

Never will it erase
pain inflicted, heartbreaks
rejections, a denial
WE—AMERASIANS—your half children
had endured.

Now I am only a visitor
treated as a foreigner
Do you not understand
Within my heart my love for you
Vietnam, I will always adore you
Miss you when I am far away
Vietnam, I am still your child...

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

In 1989, we were invited by two social workers to visit an English class in San Jose for newly arrived Amerasians from Vietnam. There, we listened to a group of young Amerasians who with some difficulty expressed their first impressions of America, their concerns for the future, and the problems, apprehension, and uncertainty they face. These touched us in many ways. They were the newest immigrants from Southeast Asia and little is known about their experiences or backgrounds. A few of their stories have been shown on the airwaves, often sensationalized and not typical of most of the cases. We feel that their voices must be heard and this study is a modest attempt to present an overview of their childhood experiences in Vietnam during the war and after the events of 1975, important background information, special legislation, migration processes, and hopes and expectations in this new land.

During the last several decades, Indochina and particularly Vietnam was at the center of major political upheavals, regime changes, bloody conflicts, and devastating warfare. French historian Bernard Fall (1966), in describing the battle of Dien Bien Phu, used the term “hell in a very small place.” Indeed this term could be applied to Vietnam as a whole.

The Vietnamese are still picking up the pieces of their lives years after the war. Some chose to stay and tried to rebuild from what was left. Many others found it hard to cope with postwar poverty and the communist system, and looked elsewhere for a better future. They left in large numbers, venturing over the open seas to neighboring countries in search of temporary asylum before being accepted by other nations as refugees. Some made it to shore and waited in camps for acceptance for resettlement; others disappeared in the sea,

falling prey to piracy or the forces of nature.

The Vietnamese were among the first refugee movements from Southeast Asia during the mid- and late seventies (Liu and Murata 1979). This flow remained constant throughout the eighties. Then, in the early nineties, the refugee movements slowed to a trickle during the years 1991 and 1992. The Amerasians and the internees of the Vietnamese re-education camps are the last to come, closing a particularly painful chapter of the Vietnam episode.

This study is one among many that look into the experiences of refugee groups since 1975. The majority of the studies have focused on Southeast Asian adults and youth in their resettlement. However, the Amerasians, children of Vietnamese mothers and American fathers, have been the subjects of only a few exploratory studies by a researchers who have focused on their psychological profiles and problems in adaptation. This descriptive study addresses the experiences of these immigrants from their childhood in Vietnam to their first few months in the United States. We hope that this will not be the only avenue for them to voice their wishes, to express their feelings, and to tell us about their lives in their own words, but perhaps the first of other more in-depth efforts.

Chapter 2

HISTORICAL ANTECEDENTS

Among the many legacies of the Vietnam War was the migration of more than one million Southeast Asians to the United States (St. Cartmail 1983; Grant 1979; Knudsen 1983). At this time, the number of arrivals has leveled off as refugee processing from Southeast Asia draws to a close. Those remaining in the camps in Southeast Asia are now in the final stages of waiting. Many camps have closed or are in the process of transferring residents to new staging areas or back to their home countries (Robinson 1992). After eighteen years, the refugee experiences have been fairly well documented, following the various groups of people who have arrived in successive periods since 1975. It is estimated that the number of Southeast Asian refugees resettled in the United States totals 1,101,054 (*Refugee Reports*, January, 1990), in the following proportions:

Vietnamese	614,547
Cambodians	147,411
Hmong	90,082
Laotians	149,014

California has been the choice of 40% of the Southeast Asians. The 1990 Census shows California with:

Vietnamese	270,516
Cambodians	68,190
Hmong	46,892
Laotians	58,058

The resettlement experiences of these new arrivals have been extensively documented by students of refugee movements (Haines

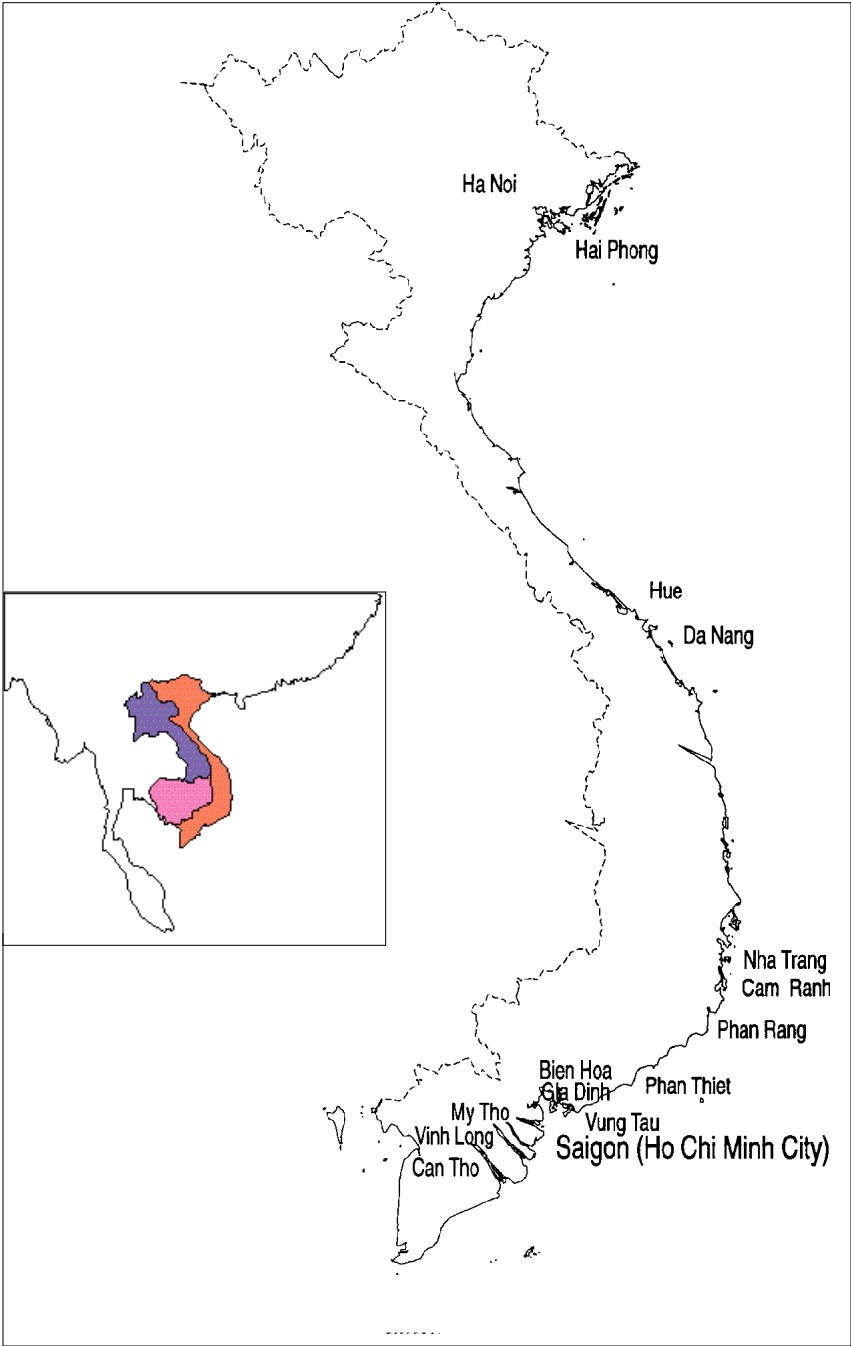


Figure 1. Map of Vietnam, with locations mentioned in the text.

1985; Rose 1986; Desbarats 1985; Portes and Rumbaut 1990). Their studies document problems with language, culture shock, unemployment and underemployment, psychological stress, job training, housing, and education (Freeman 1989; Strand and Jones 1985).

Before 1975, the only experience that the American public had with Southeast Asians was vicarious, through images shown on television and in print media. News from the battlefield filled the evening news with body bags and running refugees looking for safe haven in their war-torn country. After the victory of the Vietnamese Communists in 1975, Americans tried hard to forget this dark chapter of history and went on with their daily lives. The Vietnam War and the Vietnamese then became the subjects of Hollywood productions that presented the war in box-office style, looking back and sensationalizing a few scenarios. A number of productions assessed what had gone wrong and presented what should have been done.

Amerasian children who were the victims and the legacy of the conflict were ignored except in a few films in which the “Karate Chopper” Chuck Norris fought to free these children from the communists. In *Braddock, Missing in Action III*, the Amerasians were abused by a sadistic Vietnamese officer. The one-man army, Chuck Norris, chopped his way through the enemies and brought the poor victims to freedom. Ironically, the film was released in 1988, the year that the Amerasian Homecoming Act was enacted, regularizing the admission of Amerasians to the United States.

Ten years after the final withdrawal of American troops in Vietnam a group of American newsmen were invited back to the country where they once roamed the fields and towns and covered the war on a day-to-day basis. The return visits took the newsmen to the streets of Saigon, now called Ho Chi Minh City. There, on street corners in the downtown section where GIs had once hung out, they met young men and women with very noticeable American features selling tourist items. These Amerasians rushed to the visitors, asking

to be brought America, the land of their fathers. Many lived in the streets in makeshift shelters and supported themselves by peddling cigarettes, chewing gum, and candy (Kelly 1992). Images of these youth eagerly swarming the newsmen were shown to the American public on television. These scenes touched the conscience and compassion of Americans, including Vietnam veterans. Many of the veterans worked together to lobby their congressmen for a special program to assist these forgotten children of war.

Amerasian stories made the American public aware of the realities of their hardship. These children grew up in a traditional Asian society that rarely accepts interracial relations. When children carried the racial features of their fathers, they were treated as enemies of the new regime, which was very quick to eradicate elements of the now-defunct Republic of South Vietnam. The following two stories can be considered not as typical but as examples that have happy endings. The first story is by Mary Harrel and Jeanne Gordon and the second by Tran Tuong Nhu in her regular column in the *San Jose Mercury News*.

Mary Xinh Nguyen was born in Da Nang in 1969, several months after her father, a lance corporal in the United States Marine Corps, was wounded in the Tet offensive and sent to recover on Okinawa Island. Nguyen's mother, Thuong Thuong Nguyen, worked as a translator for a hospital. She never again heard from the man who fathered her child but she was devoted to Mary. In January, 1975, Mary and Thuong were visiting relatives in Saigon when they were told that escalated fighting made it impossible for them to return to Da Nang. A friend at the United States Embassy advised Thuong that Mary would be safer if she could get out of the country. Thuong could not leave because her older child Sean, the product of an earlier liaison, was still in Da Nang. Heartbroken, she led five year-old Mary onto an airport-bound bus operated by an American Catholic charity. "Before the bus left, we touch hands outside the window," says Thuong, "I thought I would never see her again."

Mary remembers very little of that goodbye but after spending a short time with a family in St. Louis, she was reunited with her mother in Santa Monica after Thuong found a way to escape. What makes this story interesting is that Mary was named Revlon's "Most Unforgettable Women of the Year" and collected \$25,000 in award money. Recently, one of the authors had a chance to listen to Mary Xinh Nguyen's remarks



Mary Xinh Nguyen.

at a New Year celebration in San Jose. Emphasizing that she is still part of the Vietnamese American community, she pledged to work hard for her fellow immigrants and to look for a chance to help her native country recover after a very long and difficult period.

Tran Tuong Nhu in her regular "Commentary" column told the story of Tuan Van Le, a 19 year-old young man who was born in Saigon to a Vietnamese mother and an African American father. His aunt Thai adopted him at birth and brought him to this country when he was seven. She worked hard and eventually started her own business. Tuan is crazy about football. He made news when he played cornerback for Stanford's football team. He also is learning to read his mother tongue. He was too young to have accomplished literacy when he was uprooted from his birthplace and brought to America by his aunt. Although born in Saigon, the battle of Hue and

the bombing of Hanoi and Haiphong formed the backdrop of his childhood. For many years he denied his origins. However, during his senior year in high school in Lafayette, California, Le took a class on the Vietnam War and found that he was able to reclaim his identity. “Whatever I do, although I do it for myself and my family, I still try to make Vietnamese proud of me—and through me proud of who they are.”

The Amerasian Situation in Vietnam

In the two stories above the young man and woman were brought to America when they were very young and had very little difficulty in adjusting to a new life. This is unlike a story told in the *Parade Magazine* (*Sacramento Bee*, February 19, 1988), that is more typical of Amerasians in Vietnam. A Vietnamese woman working as a mail carrier at the Long Binh Supply Base fell in love with an American GI named Bill even though she knew that he was married and had three children at home. Nguyen Thi Dep, now 45, recalled those days with fondness. She bore a child named Nguyen Thanh Tu. After the war Bill went back to Nebraska and that was the last she heard from him. Today (according to the 1988 article) Nguyen Thanh Tu is 21 and supports himself and his mother by carrying stones in Ho Chi Minh City for 50 cents a day. Dep supplements their income by selling her blood to a hospital once a month and occasionally by teaching English.

The Amerasians who have come to America under the Amerasian Homecoming Act are more like Thanh Tu in that they are older and have similar stories of hardship. Once here, there are a multitude of problems facing these new immigrants (Cerquone 1986).

Few of the Americans serving in Vietnam really knew the language and customs of the country that they were sent to defend. Only a handful came back with a deeper appreciation of the Vietnamese after they fell in love with the people and decided to explore

further by learning the language and understanding the ways of life. No matter what one thinks about the conflict, the legacies are still very visible in Vietnam. During one of the authors' last visits to Vietnam, he could see the effects of defoliation, bomb craters, and the huge cemeteries with rows and rows of tombstones. For the dead, their ordeal was ended, but for the living, under a new political system since 1975, poverty, hardship, and suffering were the norm.

Many Americans came on their tour of duty believing that it was a short stay for a good cause. They left with the idea and hope that they would never have to think about this year-long encounter. It was only one or two pages of a chapter of their lives. Many departed but left part of themselves or someone they once loved behind: an intimate relationship and the resulting offspring (Ronk 1986). Many children were born out of these associations and grew up without the presence of their fathers. Are they too casualties of war? Or perhaps they are simply the accidental children of relationships that seemed to fade away as the years passed. It is estimated that as many as 15,000 (Amerasian Update, 1989). Amerasian children grew up in Vietnam without their fathers. In interviews conducted by newsmen, many of the women said they were not angry: "We blame no one, and we accept that it is our responsibility," Nguyen Thi Dep said in *Parade Magazine*. It took the United States some 7 years to acknowledge responsibility for these American citizens left behind, and 8 more years to make the immigration process a reality.

Amerasian children growing up in Vietnam are an oddity. Because of their fair skin or very dark skin, blue eyes, or curly black hair, they couldn't go very far without drawing the attention of a crowd. Many looked at them as victims of the war, others regarded them as images of the old enemy. The Vietnamese officials of the new socialist regime and the society at large have not been very kind to them. It was very difficult during all those long years. Now, at last, the "American Connection" offered them a way out of Vietnam and the hope of a better future. At least that's what the majority of these

young immigrants expected in their fathers' homeland.

The Amerasian Homecoming Act

The first American legislative response to the plight of the Amerasians was the 1982 “Amerasian Immigration Act” (PL 93-359). This piece of legislation offered top priority to children of American fathers, not only in Vietnam but also in Korea, Laos, Cambodia, and Thailand. Authored by Senators Jeremiah Denton of Alabama and Stewart McKinney of Connecticut, this important piece of legislation granted immigration privileges only to the Amerasians; mothers and half-siblings were not permitted to immigrate. In addition, mothers of minor Amerasians had to sign an irrevocable release to allow their children to emigrate. This major flaw of the legislation was based on a lack of understanding of the needs of the Vietnamese family, which values kinship and family ties above all (Vuong 1976).

The United States placed stringent legal and financial obligations on sponsors, so that only a few Amerasians, primarily from Thailand and Korea, benefited from the 1982 legislation. Ironically, the law could not be implemented where the needs were great—in Vietnam for its Amerasians. Since the United States had not re-established diplomatic relations with Vietnam after 1975, there was no way to set up offices or create the multi-national network necessary to process Amerasians under the Amerasian Act of 1982. Even if they had been able to leave Vietnam under this legislation, they would not have been able to take advantage of government-sponsored education and employment programs offered in the United States to refugees but not immigrants.

The only way for the Amerasians from Vietnam to get around this flawed legislation was to apply to come under the auspices of the Orderly Departure Program (ODP). This program was established in 1979 when the flow of refugees reached a point where the first-

asylum countries could not cope, with 10,000 to 15,000 exits per month from Vietnam. The world community pressured the government of Vietnam to come up with a quick solution; the result was a system of orderly exit.

Beginning in December, 1982, a few Amerasians were able to leave Vietnam through the Orderly Departure Program. This program, coordinated by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), provided a legal alternative to the dangerous flight of the Vietnamese refugees by boat. Persons emigrating via ODP had to first obtain official exit permits from the Vietnamese government and then satisfy the receiving nation's eligibility requirements.

In September, 1984, then Secretary of State George Schultz, in statements before the House and Senate Judiciary Committees, announced on President Reagan's behalf that over a three-year period, the United States would admit all Amerasians, their mothers, and half-siblings. This promise was contingent on the cooperation of the Vietnamese government, which would grant exit permits for these Amerasians and their family members. At the time, estimates of Amerasians varied from 12,000 to 15,000. (Cerquone, in *Commonwealth*, 1986, estimated the total number of Amerasians at 15,000, while the *Amerasian Update*, 1989, estimated that 8,000 to 12,000 Amerasians, along with family members, would total 30,000 admissions to the United States.)

To qualify for admission under this special program, Amerasian applicants needed to provide evidence of American paternity but did not have to reveal the father's identity. Amerasian applicants were examined for "American" physical features by a team of physicians. As expected, there were some problems when the father was not Caucasian or African American but Asian American, Native American, or Mexican American. It was difficult for those applicants to prove that their fathers were indeed Americans without documents of proof, such as birth certificates, marriage licenses, letters, photos,

or other memorabilia.

The first Amerasians to emigrate from Vietnam in 1982 were children of American fathers who had petitioned for them. They arrived as United States citizens. Later, ODP was expanded to include Amerasians for whom firm documentation was not available, but who “appeared” to be fathered by Americans. These children were admitted as refugees. Among these new arrivals, there were a number of unaccompanied minors and a few orphans, but the majority emigrated with relatives. Between September, 1982 and August, 1988, the number of Amerasians coming under ODP was 4,500, with 7,000 accompanying relatives (U.S. Department of State).

This number of Amerasian admissions was very small compared to the regular refugee flow because of the burdensome exit procedures in Vietnam. Paperwork was very slow and tiresome with a certain amount of corruption involved. Only those who lived in the city had access to the information and the proper agencies to proceed with the exit procedures.

In a unilateral move in January, 1986, the Vietnamese government suspended the ODP process for Amerasians. They were angered by the classification of “refugee” given to all Amerasians rather than “immigrant.” The emigration officials in Vietnam argued that by using the term “refugee,” the United States was renewing a propaganda war by implying that these individuals were being persecuted and mistreated and were therefore forced to get out of Vietnam, while the reality was that they had applied to leave as emigrants under the Orderly Departure Program. Left stranded were 22,000 Vietnamese (Valverde 1992) who had been given exit permits but had to wait for a compromise between the two governments or a change in classification from the United States.

The two sides continued to dispute the issue as arguments arose over the choice of carriers and the role of the UNHCR. Again the Vietnamese government complained that by engaging the UNHCR

as an international organization specializing in refugee relief work and not family reunification—the proper classification for Amerasians—the United States was re-emphasizing the condition of “refugee-ness” for Amerasians. Vietnam insisted that these were not refugees and did not appreciate the involvement of the UNHCR. The program was suspended with no solution.

Just at the point of impasse, the United States and Vietnam signed a bilateral agreement in September, 1987, that would facilitate Amerasian immigration from Vietnam. Congress passed the “Amerasian Homecoming Act” (PL 100-200) authored by Robert Mrazek and Thomas Ridge, representatives from the states of New York and Connecticut. This law took effect on March 21, 1988, and stipulated that Amerasians born in Vietnam between January 1, 1962, and January 1, 1976, would have until March, 1990, to apply for an immigrant visa. This was a two-year program classifying Amerasians as immigrants, but also granting them refugee benefits.

Under this special legislation, Amerasians and their families would continue to exit Vietnam via the Orderly Departure Program with the following stipulation: the Amerasian Homecoming program would operate through the joint efforts of the Vietnamese, Thai, and American governments. The United States office in charge was the Orderly Departure Program housed in Bangkok, Thailand. This office was staffed by employees of the United States Embassy and the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC). Officials from the Embassy would travel to Ho Chi Minh City on a regular basis to interview and process Amerasians and their families. The Vietnamese government would be responsible for scheduling the interviews with the United States consular and immigration officials. In the early part of the program there was a 95% approval rate for Amerasian applicants (Valverde 1992).

After approval of the application, the Amerasian and members of the family would undergo a physical examination. If they passed, the United States would notify the Vietnamese authorities to prepare

a manifest for the cases approved for departure. By agreement with the Thai government, the manifest had to have been received in Bangkok two weeks before the Amerasians and their families arrived for final processing. After a short stop in Thailand, most of them were sent to the Philippine Refugee Processing Center (PRPC) in the province of Bataan for a six-month language training and orientation program.

This arrangement worked well as the movement of Amerasians to the United States rapidly expanded in 1989 and 1990. Although a few problems remained, such as the two-year period allowed by the American authorities to complete the program, given the nature of paperwork in both countries, the resources allocated, and the resettlement capacities of the different receiving sites, it was difficult to see completion of the processing of all eligible Amerasians in Vietnam before the deadline. Another problem was that the legislation did not initially take into account the marital status of the Amerasians. Many had spouses and children of their own and thus were forced to choose among members of their families to come with them. However, changes allowed the principal applicant to include his or her close relatives, such as step-fathers and half-siblings, as part of the family. According to a list submitted by the government of Vietnam, there were 8,435 Amerasian exits by the end of 1989 (*Amerasian Update* 1989).

Final sponsorship and resettlement in the United States were the responsibilities of private voluntary agencies (volags) that work under contract to the State Department. Many of these agencies have been active in refugee work since the late 1970s. Most recently, they are in full gear resettling from Asia the Amerasians and the Humanitarian Operation (HO) Program arrivals. (Those immigrating under the HO program are re-education camp internees who were at one point associated with American organizations or who had served in the South Vietnamese military, and because of this association have been imprisoned in re-education camps.)

Because Amerasians who came as immigrants were eligible for refugee benefits, the United States placed a quota on the number of arrivals per year. For example, in 1989, the quota was set at 12,000. Given the total estimate of 30,000 admissions, it was impossible that all of them would make the March, 1990, deadline. The Vietnamese government suggested that the deadline be extended to accommodate all the applicants still waiting in Vietnam. The Amerasian Homecoming Act was then extended for six months until the end of fiscal year 1990. Again, when the total quota was not reached in 1990, the deadline was extended until most of the cases in Vietnam could be processed.

Another factor in the deadline extensions was the ability of the processing centers to provide six months of language, employment, and cultural orientation. By April, 1989, the training center was filled beyond capacity and the United States had to cancel two charter flights from Vietnam. The United States responded with accusations that the Vietnamese government was issuing passports too slowly. There was talk about expanding the reprocessing center's facilities. There were also suggestions of direct resettlement in the United States, bypassing the camp in the Philippines. Various groups who visited the camp made negative reports, saying that there were many problems associated with the food supply and the general security (Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation 1989). Another problem was the quota applied to the Amerasians. Even with the expansion of the camp and the quick processing of paperwork in Vietnam, it was unlikely that they could process any more from Vietnam, given the ceiling of 12,000 per year.

One of the solutions considered by the United States was to expand the refugee center in the Philippines to accommodate a larger number of incoming refugees. However, with many Southeast Asian countries of first asylum increasingly reluctant to harbor refugees temporarily, this might be viewed as sending the wrong signal to Vietnam and the neighboring countries of Cambodia and Laos,

suggesting that the United States refugee door was still wide open. The might result in the triggering of another population movement from Vietnam, Cambodia, or Laos.

It is expected that with the change in refugee policies and the opening up of Vietnam that the entire program might be restructured. A new arrangement to combine all legal avenues for exit from Vietnam into one program is a possibility. During many informal conversations in the refugee camps, the staff shared their concerns about their future employment as rumors of the closing of the camps circulated among management as well as front-line workers. It is still difficult to predict the effects of a change in administration in the United States on refugee allocations. Nonetheless, with an increasingly strong repatriation program and the declining number of refugees, changes in the local refugee program sites are inevitable.

The Amerasian Transit Center

According to Mary Payne Nguyen who recently visited Ho Chi Minh City, the Amerasian transit center was conceptualized at about the same time the Amerasian Homecoming Act was enacted by the United States Congress. It is not clear who had the original idea, but various members of the State Department are pleased with the outcome. As one official said: "It's the one thing we have done with Vietnam that is totally positive. Everything about it has been okay."

Both sides agreed from the beginning that a transit center was needed. Different locations were suggested by the Vietnamese and rejected by the United States until the present site in Dam Sen, Ho Chi Minh City, was agreed upon. Originally, a much grander project was proposed by the Vietnamese who wanted to have a 2.5 million dollar facility built with amenities like swimming pools, tennis courts, and so on, but the American authorities insisted on a scaled-down project (Nguyen 1992). Finally, early in 1989, with the location and the budget agreed upon, work was begun to prepare the

site. A small cemetery had to be moved to a new location across the road and several families living in modest dwellings had to be relocated. Cement block homes were constructed for these families just behind the site and once the families were moved into their new dwellings, ground leveling and grading began. The construction site was visited several times during the building process by State Department officials. Since the Amerasian Homecoming Act was in place and the first Amerasians were being processed, members of the American interview team kept abreast of the center's progress on their trips in and out of Ho Chi Minh City.

Construction was completed in December, 1989, and opened in January, 1990. The total cost of the project, paid by the United States government, was \$497,000 (Nguyen 1992). The facility originally consisted of an administration complex, communal kitchen, dining room, and residential buildings where Amerasians and their families could reside for various lengths of time. Amerasians whose cases were being processed, but who lived in areas far from Ho Chi Minh City, could stay there as long as they needed to complete their paperwork and interviewing. Some families came and went, staying for short periods of time whenever they had paperwork to do, returning to their hometowns between visits. For orphans or singles without family members, the Amerasian transit center became home for the entire processing time. Another building in the complex provided temporary residence, for a modest fee, to relatives of Amerasians who lived at the center so that they could come for short visits from other cities. There were also Amerasians living in the streets of Ho Chi Minh City. Amerasians with no address (homeless Amerasians) were allowed to reside at the Transit Center. Early in 1991, the Vietnamese added an education building to house ESL and vocational training (Kelly 1992).

Many Amerasians lacked documents (birth certificates, resident I.D. cards, and so on), so the personnel at the Amerasian Transit Center assisted them in locating whatever records existed, piecing

together histories, and providing the necessary legal proof. Since many Amerasians were illiterate, this was a necessary and important service. Those without birth certificates had to have a medical assessment of age, and all of emigrants had to have health assessments. A few of the older Amerasians weren't fathered by Americans, but by French soldiers who occupied Vietnam until five years before the first Americans arrived. Attempts were made to be as accurate as possible in determining their true age, although this is sometimes difficult.

ICMC built and maintained a tuberculosis treatment center. All Amerasians and family members were tested and, if necessary, treated there before departure to the Philippines. Meals were provided three times a day and were prepared by staff members and eaten in the common area. Each day, food tickets were validated and distributed for the next day. Amerasians could get the meals to be eaten there or they could get canned milk which could be taken out. Some Amerasians resold the milk, providing them with a little income. The transit operation was funded by a fee paid by the United States government to the Vietnamese for each Amerasian and/or family member who actually departed Vietnam. A total of \$138 per person covered the transportation costs from their hometowns to Ho Chi Minh City, the cost of meals while at the Transit Center, administrative and maintenance costs for the Center, and the costs of health appraisals, processing documents, printing photographs, and so on. Some Amerasians, however, reported that they were charged for some of these procedures.

After the first year of operation, other activities were implemented, such as English and Vietnamese language classes and vocational classes in jewelry-making and sewing. Mrs. Tam, the assistant director of the Amerasian Transit Center, visited the Refugee Processing Center in the Philippines and saw firsthand the difficulties facing Amerasians who were illiterate in Vietnamese. Upon returning to Vietnam, she started classes to teach reading and

writing in the Vietnamese language with the hope that it would be easier for them to then learn English. The staff at the Transit Center were dedicated and caring, but they had a difficult task trying to get Amerasians to participate. As Mrs. Tam said: “They had to come to class and activities voluntarily. It was hard to impress on them the importance of doing these things. They had a very unrealistic fantasy about life in America. It was difficult to convince them that they need to prepare, and that it would take time and not be easy.”

On a visit to the Amerasian Transit Center in August, 1991, Mrs. Tam observed that the grounds of the Center were well kept and the buildings maintained properly. A fence was built around the complex and the front gate controlled entrance with a guard house. There was also a waiting area for Amerasians or family members waiting for transportation to other areas of the city. The Amerasians there were clean and generally seemed in good spirits. Those in both the English and vocational classes appeared happily engaged in those activities, but it was a small percentage of the total number of Amerasians in residence who attending the classes. Staff members were open and collegial in their discussion of the problems both in the Vietnamese processing section and in the American Transit section. All in all, the impressions during the visit to the Center were positive.

The Refugee Processing Center

Since 1980, the Bureau for Refugee Programs of the United States Department of State has operated English as a Second Language (ESL) and cultural orientation (CO) programs in refugee camps in Southeast Asia. These programs were established in the Refugee Processing Centers (RPCs) in Galang, Indonesia, Phanat Nikhom, Thailand, and Bataan, the Philippines, to prepare refugees from Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam for resettlement in the United States. The twenty-week Preparation for American Secondary School

(PASS) program for adolescents, aged 12-16, focused on academic, cross-cultural, and interpersonal skills needed by secondary school students.

In addition, the Overseas Refugee Training Program was established classes for groups with special needs, i.e., women, the elderly, and young adults. The newest special classes were developed for the young adult population (17-22 years old) in the RPCs in Thailand and the Philippines. According to reports published by the Center for Applied Linguistics in Washington D.C., the development of a curriculum targeted at the young adult population was based on a survey conducted in July, 1987, in eleven metropolitan areas in the United States. The purpose of the survey was two-fold: (1) to gather information about young adult refugees' actual resettlement experiences, and (2) to find out from voluntary agencies, mutual assistance associations, high school and adult program educators, and employers what they think pre-entry training for this age group should include. Basically, the findings suggested that young adults need training that prepares them to continue their education and to enter



The author, a refugee artist, and a counselor at the Philippine Refugee Processing Center (July 1992).

the work force at the same time.

The program staff of the Refugee Processing Center decided on a set of teaching objectives for the Young Adult Curriculum. The group drew most of the competencies from the existing adult and PASS program, and added some new material specific to the young adult population. The focus was on career assessment and planning, analysis of skills, interests, family responsibilities, and the development of basic communication and academic skills. It also included youth-oriented topics such as substance abuse, youth and the law, sexually transmitted diseases, and youth lifestyles. To prepare the incoming young immigrants for America's multi-ethnic society, emphasis was placed on race-relations issues, including topics such as prejudice, racism, and discrimination.

The training sequence served three nationalities: Vietnamese, Laotians, and Cambodian. Eighty percent of the refugee population was Vietnamese. Of these, about 30% were Chinese. The Amerasian population was from 20 to 200 at any one time. In the camp, 20-40% of the Vietnamese came via the Orderly Departure Program. All



A fun moment in Bataan (July 1992).



Keeping busy, Van Hanh Pagoda, Philippine Refugee Processing Center (July 1992).



PRPC staff relaxing during the weekend break at Bataan (July 1992).



The outdoor café in Bataan, the Philippine Refugee Processing Center (July 1992).

other refugees were termed “first asylum” cases. Among these, the great majority were Vietnamese boat people whose countries of first asylum were Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Hong Kong. The typical stay in the camps was 6 months. The arrivals and departures occurred two to three times per week except during holiday periods when camp staff were given a short break to visit their families. All adult refugees were required to perform work for the camp during the other half of the day that they were not in class.

The language training program was supervised by a group of trained language specialists brought over from the United States. The teaching assignments were assumed by locally recruited Filipino teachers who lived inside the camp. Many programs supplemented the language program, such as the audio-visual center, youth counseling office, and sport activities.

Earlier, in the beginning of this refugee training program, reports by observers and researchers were quite negative about the contents of the curriculum framework. Professor James Tollefson

(1989) in his book *Alien Winds* severely criticized the many assumptions about Southeast Asian refugees upon which the contents of the curriculum were based.

The Amerasian Resettlement Program

After completing language and cultural orientation classes in the processing centers, the Amerasians are sent to one of the fifty-five “cluster sites” in the United States. The American refugee program evaluated communities in all areas of the United States to find cities not already impacted by large Southeast Asian populations, characterized by affordable housing, available work, and support programs. The sites were set up with the objective of dividing the load of resettlement equally and thus lessening the economic impact to any particular geographical area. The government’s Office for Refugee Resettlement (ORR) provided \$35,000 to each site to implement the resettlement program for the incoming Amerasians (Ranard and Gilzow 1989). This amount was really not enough for any comprehensive resettlement program. In fact, it barely covered the salary of one staff person.

The services at the various cluster sites include orientation programs, mental health services, employment training, and English language training. There is also a community planning component and the head of this component facilitates the flow of information, such as Amerasian statistics, suggestions and initiatives for support services, to promote the understanding of the Amerasian newcomers.

According to Ranard and Gilzow (1989) all cluster sites do have personnel experienced in resettling Amerasians. They have the capacity to perform case management and follow-up services. Each site has translators and interpreters to work with Amerasians. Several sites have programs such as after-school tutorial programs,

youth programs, special counseling services, housing referrals, and job referrals.

The cluster site agencies became increasingly dependent on volunteers. Depending on the geographical location, agencies can call on the pool of Vietnamese volunteers for translation and interpretation assistance. However, isolated sites in the Midwest, for example, must count on the services of American volunteers. Ranard and Gilzow (1989) give the example of Utica, New York, as exceptional in that it established a Youth Employment Service (YES) to follow closely each newcomer Amerasian in his/her individual training plan.

Thus, the quality of the programs varies widely depending on the amount of funding available, the type of staff, and the corps of volunteers who are willing to contribute their time and effort. The typical approach during the height of the refugee influx was to get the funding first and worry about the program later.

The voluntary agencies coordinate their services under the umbrella of the InterAction Network, an organization in Washington, D.C. InterAction serves as a contracting organization to allocate government funds to qualifying voluntary agencies. InterAction gets the funds from the government's Office of Refugee Services. The method for Amerasian resettlement varies from site to site, but information sharing and strategy exchanges help in trying to understand the backgrounds and needs of the Amerasians. There is also a monthly publication by InterAction and the Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services under a cooperative agreement with the Office of Refugee Resettlement. Conferences addressing Amerasian issues are held annually in different parts of the United States.

In dealing with a new group of immigrants, the voluntary agencies have focused their efforts on a number of programs and services to effect a smooth transition to American society. Nonetheless, they still face a lack of information and understanding about the complexity of the Amerasian experiences. These newcomers them-

selves cannot articulate their needs nor their aspirations. As a result, the information given is drawn directly from journalistic reports written by newsmen who insist on the sensational. The refugee agencies then devise resettlement strategies based on media stereotypes or by on strategies that worked with earlier Southeast Asian arrivals. What we are doing is hoping for the best and with a lack of funding and the fast turnover in personnel working with Amerasians, it is difficult to establish a trusting climate between workers and newcomer clients.

Chapter 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the rapidly expanding literature focusing on Southeast Asian refugees and immigrants—their experiences, their adaptation to the stresses of relocation and adaptation, their economic successes, their problems, and their futures—can be found information about Amerasians in particular. In addition, there are three reports that are directly related to this study. Finally, some of the literature concerned with interracial relationships brings the issue of relationships between Vietnamese women and American men into a wider context.

Amerasians in Southeast Asian Refugee Literature

One general conclusion that emerges is that within each of the refugee groups are subgroups that differ in background, motivation, and rates of success in America (Ascher 1984; Bach 1984; Bach & Bach 1980; Baizerman et al. 1987; Caplan, Whitmore & Choy 1989; Colson 1989; Forbes 1985; Grant 1979; Haines 1985; Kelly 1977; Kinzie et al. 1990; Montero 1979; Peters 1987; Rumbaut & Ima 1987; Strand & Jones 1985; Williams & Westermeyer 1983). Articles that focus on Amerasians show that among Amerasians, too, there are differences in background, motivation, and early adaptation to American life (Blundell 1985; Cerquone 1986; Nicassio & LaBarbera 1986; Quinn-Judge 1983; Ranard & Gilzow 1989, Ronk 1986; Root 1992; Terris 1987.) This study assumes that there are differences between Amerasians and other Vietnamese refugees because of their differing backgrounds, and that there are also differences within the Amerasian group that mirror the range found in other groups of Vietnamese refugees and immigrants.

In 1986, Nicassio and his colleagues looked at a sample of 24 Amerasians. Using the Personality Inventory for Children (PIC), which was administered to the mothers, the authors concluded that “Amerasian youth showed greater psychological deviance than a non-clinical American sample.” In an issue of *In America*, a publication of the Refugee Service Center and the Center for Applied Linguistics, Ranard and Gilzow (1989) reported that a commonly-held view is that Amerasians have been abused. The report quotes from one of the volunteers in the program: “It turned out however that many grew up in stable families and went to school just like everybody else.” Ranard and Gilzow go on to say that the conditions for Amerasians varied widely, making generalizations of doubtful value. Charron and Ness (1987) suggest that the best three predictors of adolescent emotional distress are being female, not getting along with American classmates, and not getting along with parents.



Amerasian boy and Vietnamese girl, clowning for the camera, Philippine Refugee Processing Center (July 1992).

Studying Amerasians

There are three studies focusing on the Amerasians from Vietnam: (1) the 1985 study conducted by Sister Lacey which was published by the United States Catholic Conference; (2) a study by a team of researchers from Dartmouth Medical School and Southern Illinois University (Felsman et al. 1989); and (3) a study conducted by a team of researchers from Boston, the site of one of the Amerasian clusters (Metropolitan Indochinese Children and Adolescents' Services 1990). In addition, there is a report prepared for the Unified Vietnamese Community Council (Them 1991), unpublished reports by Blundell (1985), Rudnik (n.d.), and the Amerasian Resettlement Planning Committee (1988), an article by an Amerasian (Valverde 1992), and a young adult book by Duling (1979) on the experience of adopting an Afro-Amerasian child.

Sister Lacey compiled demographic profiles of the early Amerasian arrivals (1985). Information was collected by questionnaire, completed by refugee case workers. The findings were useful for discussing mental health problems such as loneliness, depression, and anxiety among the Amerasians. Her study also provided information on the mothers of Amerasians. Lacey noted that the average length of time of the relationships was 2 years, suggesting that a child's two parents lived together for a period of time. The author also argued that the women were not the prostitute or bargirl type that Hollywood has portrayed in their Vietnam war productions. Her survey also found that there were many serious problems during the adjustment process, particularly among unaccompanied minors, who expressed that they did not want to emigrate to the United States.

In 1989, a team of researchers went to the Refugee Processing Center in the Philippines to survey Amerasian camp residents (Felsman et al. 1989). They found that young Amerasians were at a much higher risk for failure in the public schools than their regular Vietnamese counterparts. They suggested that American schools

serving these youngsters at their resettlement sites be flexible, sensitive, and patient.

The Boston study conducted by the Metropolitan Indochinese Children and Adolescents' Services in Chelsea, Massachusetts, was based on 72 Amerasian teen-agers and young adults living in the greater Boston area. The survey found that the average respondent was 18 years old, had attended school for five years, had been in the United States for a little more than three years, and because of background and derision from peers, were likely to require more support than other Indochinese refugees. Of those surveyed, 60% received public aid, two-thirds attended school for 16 hours per week or more, and a third had fewer than three years of formal schooling.

Kieu Them (1991) summarized data related to Amerasian youth, but cited the source only as a study called "Vietnamese Amerasians," by researchers surveying Amerasians in the Philippine Refugee Processing Center. In a discussion of the resettlement process, Them suggested that Amerasians would find it relatively easy to find work and to integrate into American society, since it is their fathers' country. This was by far the most optimistic of all reports.

Another report circulated among refugee workers was Lynn Blundell's "The Acculturation of Amerasian Adolescents" (1985). This paper discussed many problems facing the Amerasian adolescent, based on the presumption that many come from dysfunctional families. The report states (without citing sources):

"They arrive in America malnourished and neglected medically and emotionally. They have undergone a foreshortened childhood and a brief introduction to their new lives. They feel ill-equipped to function as adults and yet too old to be adolescent. Their educational and emotional development have been sacrificed to take care of themselves and their family. They are confused with an incomplete identity and unrealistic expectations of reunion with their fathers. They have been jeered at and

called ‘American’ all their lives. Yet they wonder why, upon finally seeing so many people who look like them, they are not accepted.”

This report neglected to discuss the influence of the extended family support system and the importance of traditional religious belief in pulling the family together during times of crisis.

Joan Rudnik presented a report for the Lutheran Social Services of Minnesota, titled “Amerasian Unaccompanied Minors: Dynamics Influencing Foster Care Placements” (no date). This summary of the resettlement process cautioned social workers about the challenge of working with Amerasians. The suggestion that most of the Amerasian children were born of short-term relationships or liaisons of days or weeks is inconsistent with the findings in Lacey’s study (1985).

Caroline Valverde (1992) wrote the essay, “From Dust to Gold: The Vietnamese Amerasian Experience,” for Root’s book on racially mixed people in the United States. The chapter reviews the historical and legislative background of the Amerasian Homecoming Act, as well as the pre-migration and migration experience. Important because this is the only piece written by a Vietnamese Amerasian, she provides the insider view that there should be a resettlement policy and information sharing organization for Amerasians run by Amerasian.

Gretchen Duling wrote a book for teenagers and young adults (“Adopting Joe, a Black Vietnamese Child,” 1977). This account of her experience of adopting an African Amerasian child proved to be an interesting guide book for couples contemplating interracial adoption. It was an ethnographic account, laced with useful anecdotes.

The Amerasian Resettlement Planning Committee prepared a report (1988) that included a profile of incoming Amerasians. The report included the conclusion that Afro Amerasians faced the worst conditions in Vietnam. Amerasians, it continued, come from single

parent homes and because of the lack resources, they are illiterate or characterized by a very low educational level and no transferable skills. This report, like Blundell's and Rudnik's, underestimated the role of the extended family in providing support and resources.

Although serious survey or comparative research on Amerasians is not yet widely available, a few conclusions can be at least tentatively suggested. Amerasians are likely to experience different acculturative stresses because of their physical incongruence with their cultural and linguistic characteristics. It is likely that at least some Amerasians, like some of the non-Amerasian Vietnamese refugees, arrive with little or no formal schooling and no fathers. Felsman et al. (1989) and others strongly advocate for long-term support with experienced and well-trained workers who can maintain continuous contact and follow-up work.

Interracial Relationships

The issue of intermarriage and multiracial identity has emerged only recently in the Asian American communities with researchers such as Kitano (1983), Spickard (1989), and Sung (1990), among others, examining these issues in sociological studies. Once forbidden by law and condemned by society, interracial relationships are becoming more and more commonplace among Asian Americans. Judging from the current body of literature on the subject of intermarriage, outmarriage, and interracial relationships, there are several theoretical arguments to explain the social and economic factors that are correlated with the increasing rate of intermarriage.

One of the factors is an unbalanced sex ratio that leads to interracial marriages because of the lack of potential partners within the group, as exemplified by the Filipino males in the first half of the twentieth century in America. The size of the minority community itself can promote outmarriage. Given the large number of Vietnamese Americans in California, the rate of outmarriage in this commu-

nity is fairly low as compared with that in the more isolated settlements of Vietnamese in Nebraska or Minnesota. In other words, the larger the minority community the lower the rate of outmarriage. Studies also suggest that the rate of interracial relationships will increase steadily as America becomes more and more open to racial and cultural heterogeneity (Spickard 1989).

Other theories deal with the compatibility of the cultures and religious values. For example, it is not uncommon to find Protestants marrying Protestants and Buddhists marrying Buddhists, even across racial boundaries. Racial features are hypothesized to be the determining factor in other models; it is far more difficult to cross the racial boundaries than the ethnic or nationality boundaries. For example, intermarriage typically is more likely between Vietnamese and Korean, but less so between Vietnamese and African Americans.

The terms *hypergamy* (marrying “up”) and *hypogamy* (marrying “down”) are used to describe intermarriage in terms of relative status. In America, a Caucasian Protestant male marrying a Buddhist Asian female is an example of hypergamy (from the woman’s point of view), in that she is increasing her social status by marrying a member of the group that hold more power in the society. Theorists suggest that one factor in intermarriage is the desire for association with members of higher status groups. Betty Lee Sung, in her *Chinese American Intermarriage* (1990), suggests that there are two types of intermarriage: those in which the people are the courageous trend-setters, vanguards, innovators, and adventurers, and those in which the people are self-haters, rebels, neurotics, and social climbers.

Can these theories be applied to cases of the Vietnamese women who chose their mates outside of her own ethnicity? Given the lack of research on this particular population, it is difficult to clearly explain the situation. Within the context of the war and the socio-political relationships between the native population and the power-

ful foreigners (first the French, then the Americans) who had no reason to enter serious commitments, these relationships must be studied from the perspective of the Vietnamese women who have been silent or ignored all these years.

Chapter 4

THE STUDY

If educators or social service providers look at the entire Southeast Asian refugee phenomenon, they quickly realize that it is a very difficult undertaking to set up a comprehensive plan for refugee education and resettlement. The more intensive the attention, the clearer it becomes that educators as well as resettlement workers are faced with a complex diversity of issues and problems. This particular study looks at a number of these issues, specifically those that deal with the migration and resettlement of Amerasians.

It is hoped that this report can offer insights into the background experiences, the social circumstances, the cultural traits, and the adjustment issues that are pertinent to this new group of Southeast Asians. At the same time, we are aware that we may be treading on dangerous ground because to date there is still very little research literature available on this population. In our study, the incoming Amerasians discuss their experiences, their impressions of the new society, and their aspirations for their futures in America. This is an attempt we hope to continue in order to present a more complete picture of the entire migration and adaptation of Amerasians.

This study will particularly focus on the Amerasians who arrived as part of the Amerasian Homecoming Act. Among the many questions that this report attempts to answer are: what were their experiences in Vietnam? How were they treated? What was the process to facilitate their departure to the United States? With whom did they come? What are their expectations and what were the problems they faced when they arrived in the United States? The answers provided by this study will help clarify a number of issues regarding the Amerasians and their families.

Background of the Study

In late 1989, we were invited to speak on many topics concerning the adaptation of the newly arrived Southeast Asians. At this statewide conference, a group of Vietnamese professionals discussed the changing characteristics of the new refugee arrivals and shared their concerns about the lack of adequate programs or trained personnel to work with the new immigrants in all aspects of the resettlement process. Those young immigrants were the Amerasians. They had been largely ignored by both Americans and the Vietnamese refugee community in the United States.

After several follow-up meetings, we arrived at a semi-detailed plan for a project aimed at providing the necessary information to educators as well as service providers who would be working with these young immigrants. We formed a team with a senior team leader from the California State Department of Education, Dr. Van Le; a faculty member from San Francisco State University, Chung Hoang Chuong, Assistant Professor of Asian American Studies, an educator from the San Jose Unified School District, Ms. Kim Lan Nguyen; and a social worker for Santa Clara County, Mr. Philip Nguyen.

Later on, the team was reduced to two members with Van Le and Chung Hoang Chuong as the principal researchers and writers for this project. With overwhelming support of many professionals and educators from various locations within the state of California, we were able to contact administrators and staff personnel who worked with Amerasians. Many volunteered to administer our questionnaire and many others gave us names of individuals in charge of the local resettlement of new Amerasians. This is the work of many anonymous friends and volunteers who have donated their time and energy to this project.

Amerasians: Working Definitions

What do we mean by Amerasian? In a broader context, an Amerasian is a person who is born of an American father and an Asian mother or vice versa. In a more Vietnam-specific context, the latter case is not very common. This is a widely accepted definition. Within the context of this report, the term “Amerasian” has a more restricted meaning. It is used to designate children of American fathers (American in this context would include all racial groups that constitute the American population) from both the United States Armed Forces and civilian agencies stationed in Vietnam during the war and of Vietnamese women.

We should distinguish Amerasian children in Vietnam as belonging to two different social definitions and to one official definition, part of the legislation allowing the admission of the Amerasians to the United States.

1. Amerasians are those individuals who were born from a legal marriage between United States civil servants and native Vietnamese women. Usually, when they finished their assignments in Vietnam, these fathers returned to the United States with their wives and children, and provided them with paternal care, love, and other opportunities.
2. Amerasians are those individuals who were born from relationships between American servicemen and Vietnamese women. These women were for the most part were employed in and around the American bases. There were also a few relationships involving bargirls and entertainers who worked in large military centers such as Da Nang, Saigon, Can Tho, and Long Binh. These relationships sometimes lasted a few years and other times for only a short period of time. The children who were born from short-term relationships suffered a great deal during the post-war period. Many of these

fathers had their own families in the United States waiting for their return. The Vietnamese mothers sometimes considered the results of these relationships as accidents but due to strong religious beliefs and cultural pressures, did nothing to terminate the pregnancies.

3. Amerasians are those individuals who were admitted to the United States as immigrants pursuant to the Amerasian Homecoming Act of 1987 (Section 584, Immigration & Nationalization Act, effective March 21, 1988) or as American citizens subsequent to September 30, 1988, pursuant to Amendment 84 of the Foreign Appropriations Act for fiscal year 1989 (Department of Health and Human Services).

It is only recently, as the first groups of Amerasians arrived, that resettlement workers began to look for new terms to distinguish Vietnamese Amerasians of Caucasian fathers and Amerasians fathered by African Americans. This is something new and to date, there is no consensus about appropriate terminology. For the purpose of this report, we will use “Afro-Amerasians,” “Asian Amerasians,” and “Euro-Amerasians,” when the distinction is necessary for the discussion. When identifying the race of the father is important to the discussion, the terms Caucasian, African, Asian, and Hispanic (even though this is a cultural rather than racial designation) will be used.

Research Method

Given the limited budget for the project, we hoped to come up with something feasible yet meaningful. We counted on the assistance of the staff and personnel from newcomer projects in the various school districts with large clusters of Amerasians. Because they were in contact with newly arrived Amerasians, volunteer

researchers were able to administer questionnaires. We decided that the best way was to advertise among educators who had contact with the subjects and with their support and cooperation, we would be able to start our survey. Thanks to Dr. Van Le and his vast network of friends and educator colleagues, we were able to secure willing and able volunteers to complete this survey by using the snowball method.

The first step was to come up with a questionnaire. What do we want to know? What type of information is important and relevant to the practitioners in the field? How do we prepare the interviewers, given the problems of logistics? How scientific do we want to get with this special survey?

The questionnaire went through several drafts of revision. We asked our colleagues to be generous with their comments. We decided on a bilingual questionnaire since most of our volunteer interviewers or field workers were Vietnamese and could ask the questions in the native language. By doing so, the nuances and originality of the responses would not be lost. This would also put the respondent at ease, not having to struggle with concepts in a new language. We discovered that this questionnaire is the only questionnaire that used Vietnamese as the medium for interviewing Amerasians. Other refugee studies carried out by health and mental health professionals typically used English as the medium of interaction or the questions were drafted in English first then translated as asked. This is not to say that they are not valid. However, certain Vietnamese expressions cannot be easily translated and paraphrasing the message does not fully carry the intention of the respondents. With the use of Vietnamese, we hoped to capture the cultural underpinnings as well as the most accurate responses and feelings of the respondents as expressed in the native language. For example, one of the returned questionnaires had the answer “khong duoc thoai mai,” describing a psychological state, a term that cannot be easily translated. We attempted to use the approximate equivalent of “not

quite at ease” but this was not the true feeling expressed. Other terms such as “bo ngo” (feeling awkward), “lac long” (feeling lost), or “thieu thon mat mat” (lacking something and losing something) describe reactions reported by the respondents in their new environment. We found that many respondents wrote their answers directly while others who had difficulty with written Vietnamese chose to answer orally, with our interviewers filling in the questionnaire.

Altogether the questionnaire contained 47 items grouped into sections: personal information, pre-migration experience, migration experience, camp experience, and adjustment and adaptation. We wanted information on the entire experience spanning 15 to 20 years and covering the entire journey from Vietnam to the Refugee Processing Center and then to the United States.

In the personal information section, we included the father’s ethnic background, the respondent’s birthplace in Vietnam, as well as his or her address prior to the departure. As with other Southeast Asian refugees, these newcomers had to go through a sponsoring agency which provided the initial resettlement help. Names of voluntary agencies, date of arrival, first United States destination, and a current address comprised the remaining items in this section.

One of the motivating reasons behind the passage of the Amerasian legislation was the hostile treatment and educational deprivation suffered in Vietnam after 1975 for being of mixed parentage. We included among the items questions about their English language skills and their educational background in Vietnam with details on the number of years in school or current grade level. Also, looking at the overall atmosphere and condition of the educational setting, we inquired about the attitudes of the local government as well as the reaction and behavior of the teaching staff. We asked the respondents to comment or inform us about other factors such as the general feelings of the community where they lived and the type of relationships, if any, the respondents engaged in when in Vietnam. Details of the family situation in Vietnam were

also questioned. With whom did they stay? Who were their friends in Vietnam?

In the next section on migration procedures, we asked for the different steps required to apply for an exit permit. We asked how the applicant obtained the information and the assistance needed to begin the emigration process. We were also curious about the length of the waiting period for the paperwork to be processed. In a few cases we extended the interview to include personal anecdotes on how the exit visa was obtained, showing different strategies, including bribery and subterfuge. We also inquired about the effectiveness of all official agencies encountered during the entire process.

We were aware of the range of expectations that these newcomers might have had prior to their arrival. We interviewed them, by questionnaire and in face-to-face interviews conducted in the refugee camp in the Philippines. What do they really want to do and what do they want to be?

One aspect of the Amerasian experience that we wanted to explore was the camp experience. Due to the nature of the training program and the length of time spent in the camp in the Philippines, we felt it important to get the reactions of these young men and women. With many reports and publications criticizing the training program, we tried to get an accurate assessment from the recipients of these services. Specifically, we asked the respondents what they thought about the program. Were they getting the promised skills and preparation for a new and very modern society? What types of problems did they face in the camp? What was their assessment of the effectiveness of the language training program, cultural orientation, and work orientation program? We also wanted to know about the average length of stay in the camp, with a complete description of their daily activities. We provided room for very personal comments and reactions to the training programs.

The section on adjustment and adaptation contained more questions than the other sections because in this section we sought

information on the types of problems the respondents encountered during the resettlement process. We asked for the respondents' first impressions when they landed in the United States and their participation in education programs, including language training and schooling. What were the perceived problems and the nature of the problems? We asked about the respondents' plans after finishing school. Also, how was their social situation? Were they able to make friends or establish any kind of relationship with other individuals at school or at work?

We also asked about the problems encountered at home. What type of difficulties did they have to face within the family? Furthermore, what were their feelings and impressions of the surrounding community? Was the community knowledgeable and receptive? Did anyone give a helping hand or were they totally indifferent? What kinds of solutions were possible? We wanted to know the reasoning and the strategies used in solving these initial problems.

We inquired about their efforts in locating their fathers. What were the results and what types of difficulty did they encounter in the process? What did they expect from their fathers? If the efforts were unproductive, what were their reactions and feelings and what did they plan to do next?

Attempting to know the reactions of these young adults during the first few months in the United States, we asked for their feelings and any reactions they might have had after their arrival. In fact, we wanted them to discuss the entire situation from the very first day in the United States in their neighborhoods. Reflecting on the situation and thinking about their relatives left in Vietnam, what did they think of them? Did they miss Vietnam? Whom did they miss most? And so on...

Given the information they received about the current socio-economic situation, what kind of objectives did they have for their immediate future? What were their specific individual plans to be successful here? What types of career did they have in mind? What

were their visions of their situations ten years from now? We included a section where they could add personal comments.

Throughout the survey process, we strongly emphasized that the questionnaire would be kept confidential. A copy of this report would also be available to each of the respondents if they left their address with us.

After almost twelve months of using the telephone and meeting personally with the volunteers from the various locations, we sent the final revised questionnaires to our contacts. They were briefed on how to use the questionnaire particularly on how to administer the questionnaire to respondents who could not read or write Vietnamese. Some interviewers asked the questions and wrote down the answers; others gave the questionnaires to the respondents to answer for themselves without any assistance.

The Research Sample

At first, we wanted to look at a national sample so that our profile could be generalized to Amerasians throughout the country. After much debate and discussion, we decided on a California sample since this is the state with the largest concentration of Vietnamese Americans, important to our method.

The respondents were selected by virtue of their being Amerasian, and willing to participate in the survey. We used the network of educators and resettlement workers to identify participants, and we visited gatherings likely to attract Amerasians, and solicited participation. We were greeted with enthusiasm at some locations and with suspicion at others. By in large, the respondents were located by personal contact. We received questionnaires from more than 300 respondents after almost six months of sending out reminders and calling them on the phone.

After going through all the returned questionnaires, there were a few that we could not use because of many incomplete answers or

because the respondents failed to provide key information about themselves such as age, sex, or birthplace. We had to discard 40 questionnaires and finally got 275 complete questionnaires with very useful information and personal comments.

Some Limitations

The sample is not truly random, so the generalizations can be applied to Amerasians only with caution. The general profile will describe the California Amerasians the best, and will provide a starting place for a study based on a national sample of Amerasians.

The interviewing method itself may affect the results. Instructions to interviewers were given over the phone rather than in person. The way in which the interviewers asked questions may have influenced the answers, particularly in the direction of agreeing with the perceived preferences of the interviewer (specifically, political inclinations, class background, and education level). This effect would have been lessened when the respondents wrote their own responses, in private and with the promise of anonymity. However, in many cases in which the respondents were limited in literacy, the interviewers asked the questions and wrote in the answers.

The fact that respondents were volunteers in all likelihood influenced the responses. A different kind of answer might be expected from an Amerasian who did not wish to be questioned, or did not even want to be recognized as Amerasian.

Chapter 5

THE DATA

Analyzing forty-seven items that often had long and detailed answers was difficult. We paid attention to the comments and looked for suggestions; for example, when we asked about the strategies considered by the subjects to solve the problems encountered at home, we found very practical solutions.

General Profile

One of the objectives of this survey is to compile a profile of this new group of immigrants from Vietnam. Is this Amerasian population arriving after 1988 any different from the earlier Vietnamese refugee groups, and if so, in what ways?

Gender and Racial Breakdown

The results show an almost equal ratio of males to females in our sample: 139 males to 136 females, for a total of 275. Among the males, 106 responded that their fathers were Caucasian; 25 answered African, and 8 indicated that their fathers' ethnic backgrounds were Asian, Hawaiian, or Hispanic. Among the female respondents, 98 indicated that their fathers were Caucasian, 24 African and 14 of other ethnic backgrounds. Thus, of the total, 76.26% is Euro-Amerasian, 17.99% is Afro-Amerasian, and 5.76% is other Amerasian.

Age Breakdown

Most of the Amerasians in our sample are in their late teens and early adulthood at the time of our survey. Their birthdates fall

between 1961 and 1975, which corresponds to the time that the largest contingency of American troops were in Vietnam, right after the Tet offensive in 1968 when they totaled more than half a million.

The largest group (in 1991) was the 18-21 age bracket with a high of 165 out of the total 275, or 60%. There was no respondent younger than 15 years of age. The oldest group contained only three female respondents, 29 years old, which nearly corresponds to the years 1959-1960 when the first military advisers arrived in Vietnam. These young adult Amerasians, 15-29 years old at the time of our survey, have spent their childhood and adolescence in Vietnam.

Birthplace Characteristics

In general the Amerasians' parents met in large urban areas where there were American facilities and military compounds. Of the 181 respondents who indicated birthplace, 42% were born in Saigon, and indeed it was the largest city in South Vietnam and was the destination for many Americans on their "R and R" (rest and relaxation). Other birthplaces mentioned were Bien Hoa (8%), My Tho (6%), Da Nang (7%), Can Tho and the delta (15%), Nha Trang (15%), and Vung Tau (8%). These cities, although small in comparison to Saigon, were the sites of major military bases. Bien Hoa was an important airfield for combat support and resupply; Can Tho was considered an important urban center in the Delta with the control center of military region IV; and Vung Tau was a seaside resort where many GIs escaped the tensions of the war. There are no official statistics showing the geographical distribution of approximately 15,000 Amerasians in Vietnam but it is logical to assume that the majority of them were born in either large cities or urban centers neighboring large United States military bases. It may be that those born and raised in rural areas were less likely to be represented in our sample; those who lived in Saigon had easier access to both information and the emigrant processing.

Recollections of Fathers

We wondered if the respondents had met or known their fathers, or if they knew anything about their fathers' identity, so we asked if they knew their fathers' names. Not surprisingly, many responded in the negative. The few who did know their fathers' names knew only their first names—Bill, John, or Steve. (Of course, for the Vietnamese, many American surnames are unfamiliar and difficult to remember.) One respondent reported that she saw a photograph of her father with a mustache. Another said his name was Bill. The most information retained was nothing more than the father's name and an old address in the United States that the respondent attempted to contact, only to receive the original letter back with a stamped message, "return to sender."

Recollections of father:

Yes, I know my father:	7
No, no knowledge of father:	268

Only five respondents were able to write the full names of their fathers; however, these five came with their intact families during the 1975 evacuation. These five still maintain contact with their fathers, while the majority lost all contact after the war. Some indicated that the information left behind by their fathers was destroyed after 1975. Fearing reprisal and harassment, their mothers concealed all the documents so well that they could not be found.

Concentrations in Vietnam

The next question asked for the respondents' address in Vietnam. We were interested in this information because we wanted to discover whether there was any movement or change of address within Vietnam, by cross-checking this address with the respondent's birthplace. Indeed, there was movement from the original birthplace

to other cities or locations. Sixty percent moved from Saigon to Binh Dinh, Hau Giang, An Giang, Ben Tre, Pleiku, and My Tho; 40% remained in their place of birth. A few of the respondents told us that the move from the city was necessary because of harassment and other unpleasant incidents. Others said they were forced to relocate to the New Economic Zones (NEZ), a post-1975 government program.

One reason that the many of our sample reported urban addresses may have been because information on the Amerasian Homecoming Program was not disseminated to the villages. It was only in large cities such as Saigon that one could start the necessary paperwork and go to the proper agency to complete the exit procedures.

Years of Arrival

The majority of the Amerasian arrivals arrived after 1988. In fact, 256 respondents out of 275, or approximately 94%, arrived from 1985 to 1990. Before 1985, the yearly arrival rates were fairly

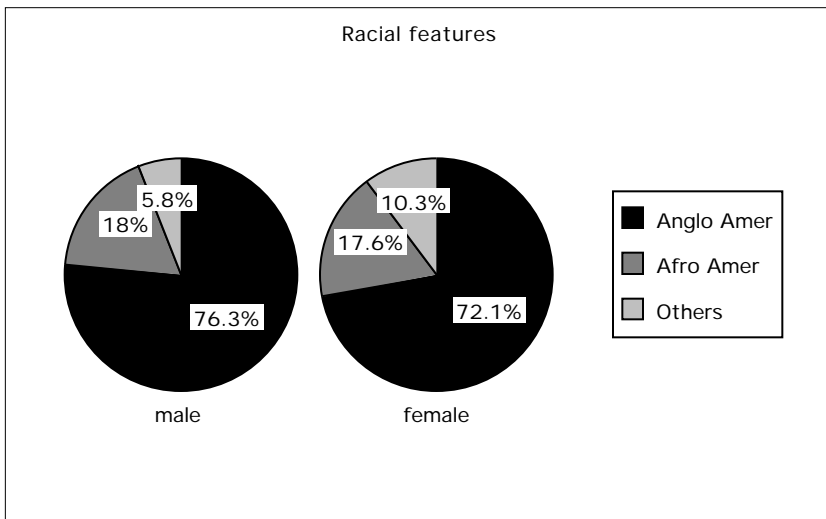


Table 1. Racial breakdown.

low. For instance, in 1984 there were eight arrivals and in 1983 only two. The breakthrough was in 1988 with 18 and then in 1989 with 101, and in 1990 with 100. This is clear evidence that the original 1982 Amerasian program had significant problems that were corrected with the 1987 legislation, and that the officials devised a workable system despite the lack of diplomatic relations.

Sponsoring Agencies

The role of the voluntary agencies has been very important in all aspects of the resettlement process. Volags to date have provided the

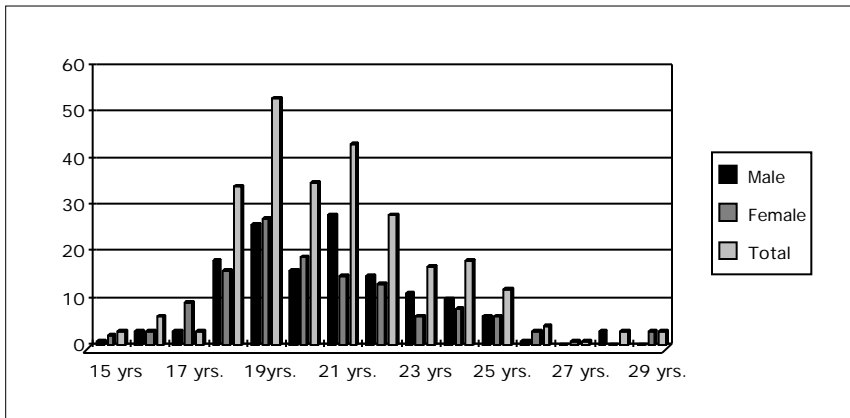


Table 2. Gender and age (1991). [N=232; 43 respondents did not answer.]

orientation and language programs in the refugee processing centers and services once refugees arrive in the United States (only 9 cases, or 3%, were picked up directly). Of the sponsoring agencies, USCC (United States Catholic Conference) is the agency with the largest caseload of Amerasian clients, followed by IRC (International Rescue Committee, CWS (Church World Service), and LIRS (Lutheran Immigrant and Refugee Services). Fifty-one respondents, or 18%, did not remember their sponsors.

Amerasian Concentrations in California

“Secondary migration” was characteristic of the Amerasian group just as it was for the other groups of Southeast Asians. This phenomenon is discussed by researchers Forbes (1985), and Mortland and Ledgerwood (1987), among others. Mortland and Ledgerwood (1987) identified key factors in secondary migration: kinship, patron/client relationship, and the easy mobility of the population. Respondents in our survey indicated that moves were motivated by the search for work, reuniting with family, warmer climate. We found that more than 30% of the Amerasians had moved from their original place of resettlement in New York, Boston, Denver, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Oklahoma, and Alabama to California.

Los Angeles, Orange, and San Diego counties reported the highest rates of Amerasian resettlement (Office of Refugee Resettlement, October, 1988). The current addresses of our respondents were Westminster, Santa Ana, Garden Grove, and San Diego in southern California and San Jose and Sacramento in northern California. Two-thirds (66%, or 183) of the sample lived in southern California.

Pre-Migration Experience

In this section, our focus was on the pre-migration experiences, including the level of prior education, English skills, and their socio-economic condition in Vietnam prior to departure.

English Language Skills

In terms of English language skills, we expected very low levels of English and very few years of education in Vietnam. We did find that more than half of the respondents, 58.5 %, indicated that they did not know any English; 27.6% answered that they could perform

some English language skills but very poorly; and only 13.8% said that they had some speaking skills. We explored further by asking them to specify the skills that they thought they could perform the best. They indicated that speaking was more difficult than understanding. Here, we got into some difficulty as we did not ask the respondents to rate their speaking skills; for instance, could they say a few sentences or could they hold a simple conversation, or could they participate in a fairly elaborate discussion. A few respondents said they could read and write English, but that number was less than 10%.

Education in Vietnam

It is the general feeling of many refugee workers that this new group of Southeast Asians came to the United States with very little education in Vietnam. We found that 14% (38 out of 275) of the respondents did not go to school at all; 17.5% (or 48) had fewer than three years of education; 32% (or 88) had between four and six years of education; 36.5% (or 80) had more than six years of education; and only one respondent had more than 12 years of education. In summing up, 75% of the Amerasians in this study have had fewer than eight years of education. It is difficult to chart a course of education for these newcomers because of their ages: should they concentrate on a vocation or do they still have the ability and the will to go through an academic program leading to a college degree?

There is a drastic drop in numbers after the 9th grade. For example, 29 respondents showed that they had completed the 9th grade level, while only 7 showed that they gone on to the tenth grade. The number gets smaller as we go up in grades. Attempting to get some clarification for this sudden change, we heard a number of answers from the respondents. They varied from: (1) 9th grade education was enough to get out and earn a living; (2) school was difficult as they faced discrimination and harassment; (3) they

simply left school for work due to the economic situation of the family; or (4) they were advised that there was practically no chance to get any higher in education due to their backgrounds.

When asked about their reactions toward the education system and what they remembered most about school in Vietnam, we got a wide range of answers. For most, school was unpleasant overall because of the hostile attitudes of many teachers as well as no support from other school staff. A few talked about a good relationship with a particular teacher who showed more understanding, compassion, and support than others. Some recognized that being Amerasian was a handicap in Vietnam due to racial prejudice. Others said they hated the emphasis on political education or indoctrination that is typical of education in communist countries.

There were also those who were determined to complete their education, and succeeded against high odds. According to their stories, they were very discouraged at first by the unfair treatment but they learned to adjust and work with the system and not get frustrated. They won the support of a few key individuals and made

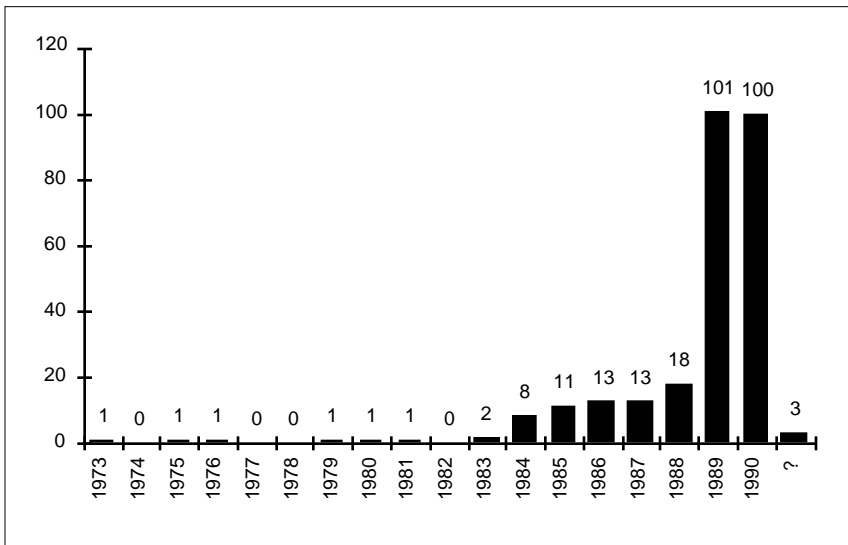


Table 3. Years of arrival in the United States.

it from one step to the next. Personal skills and goal-oriented strategies were cited as key factors in their success. One of the researchers met one of these unusual cases, who is now in his senior year at the University of California at Berkeley.

Family Composition in Vietnam

We asked about the family composition in Vietnam, specifically the identity of their primary caretaker and their best friend in Vietnam. Most of the answers identified the mother or grandmother as their primary caretaker (206, or 75%); 46, or 17%, lived by themselves; and 23, or 8%, lived with adoptive parents. This revises the assumption that Amerasians were children of the streets of Saigon, without a normal childhood and hence, lacking love and support, unable able to adjust to the new society once they arrived in the United States. Many Amerasians did have close friends who were also Amerasians (126 named friends when asked who was close to them, and of those, 28 were Amerasians). Sharing the same experience, they lived in the same area and supported one other.

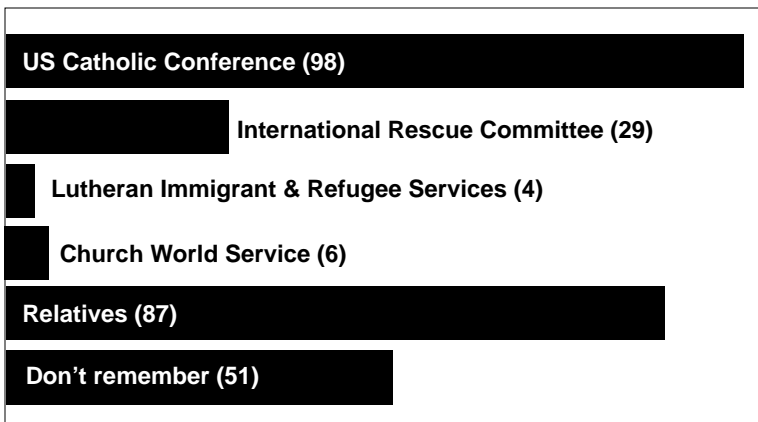


Table 4. Sponsors.

Migration Experience

An overwhelming 97% of the Amerasians went through this Orderly Departure Program for their legal exit from Vietnam. The others were sponsored directly by their fathers who brought them to the United States from Vietnam as immigrants or escaped with the “boat people.”

Paper Parents and Golden Children

We found that 10% of Amerasians showed up not with their natural mothers but with their adopted parents. When we looked for information about these relationships, many respondents were reluctant to elaborate other than to say that they were adopted by these individuals that they did not really know well or who had become part of their family. Only a few individuals, particularly in the Refugee Processing Center in the Philippines, came forward to explain this unusual arrangement. Amerasians became hot commodities in Vietnam after the passage of the Homecoming Act. They provided legal and official passage for otherwise ineligible Vietnamese to come to the United States. Before 1988, the experience of Amerasians was that of frustration, discrimination, and neglect. They were suddenly sought after, at a very high price. At the going rate of three taels of gold, they were sold to adopting families who would carry forged paperwork to certify that these Amerasians were adopted legally. In many instances, the Amerasians left their close relatives behind and went to America with new identities and relationships. The problem emerged when they arrived at the Refugee Processing Center in the Philippines or in America. Knowing that they were safe, the paper parents did not hesitate to distance themselves from the principal petitioner. Adopting parents felt they no longer needed the accompanying Amerasian and found various ways, sometimes ugly, to end the relationship. There were unbeliev-

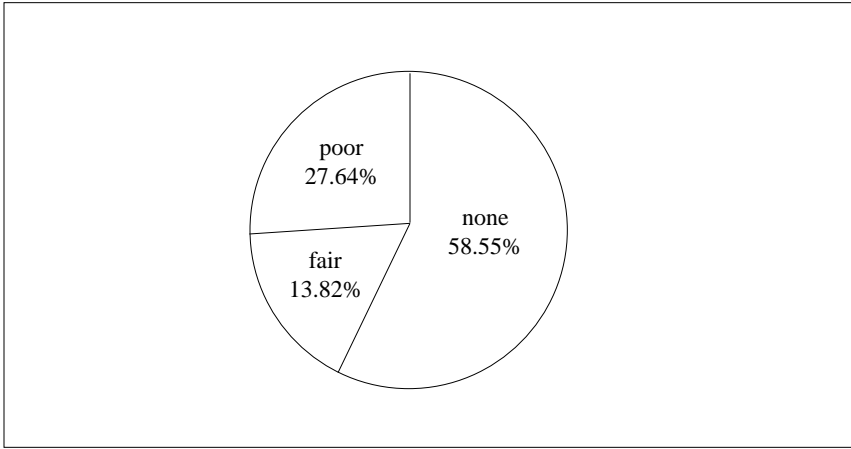


Table 5. English speaking skills.

able stories about the ones who underwent plastic surgery from unqualified physicians in Vietnam to alter their physical traits to resemble the physical features of the families who bought them. Unqualified and unscrupulous plastic surgeons left ugly scars and marks that victims carry (Dang 1990).

In our survey, we had 28 cases who admitted that they came with their adopted parents. However, we suspect that there were other cases who chose not to identify the relationship for fear of administrative problems that might arise.

Waiting for the Exit Visa

Paperwork in a socialist country is often a nightmare. Even with all the documents certifying the father's relationship, there was often long waits for the departure notification. Many respondents said that they started their application as early as 1978 or 1979 and that it took almost ten years before they were allowed to leave Vietnam. The longest waiting time was 120 months and the shortest 6 months. Within that range, the nearly one-third of the respondents waited between 72 and 84 months. Only a handful reported that their waiting

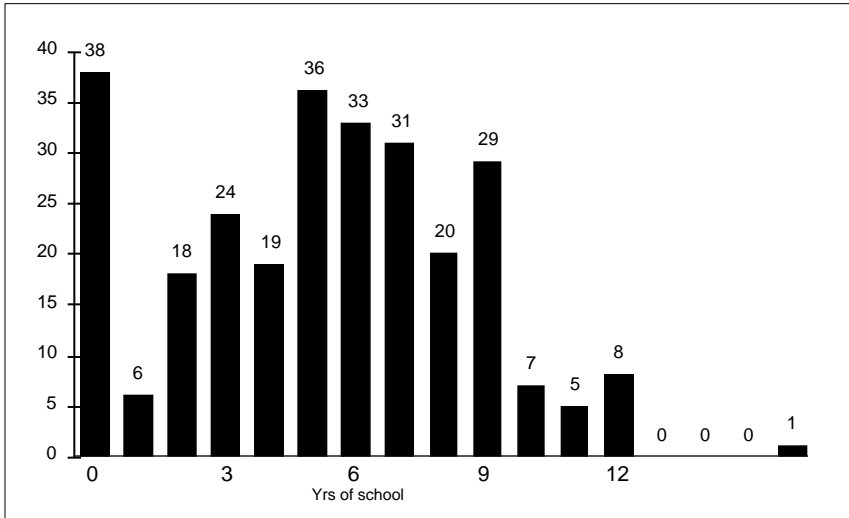


Table 6. Prior education.

period was less than one year. In some cases, money placed in between the pages of documents shortened the waiting time.

When asked about help in getting the exit permits from the government, the majority of the respondents answered that relatives were instrumental in getting the necessary papers for the exit permit. More than 60% indicated that their mother was the key person in getting the paperwork done. Others indicated that the help came from other individuals, such as religious people, foster fathers, adopted mothers, step dads, or friends.

Family Composition at Arrival

Most of the Amerasians in our study came with their mothers and many with their half siblings and step fathers. Typically, the family stayed together during this entire process. Close relatives such as uncles, aunts, cousins were also allowed to join the principal applicant. The size of the Amerasian family ranged from 1 to 8.

Expectations at Arrival

One of the questions we included in this part of the questionnaire was about the kinds of expectations Amerasians held prior to their arrival in their father's country. We expected the primary reason for emigrating was to reunify with their fathers. We found that this was not the only reason nor the first priority. More than half of the Amerasians looked forward to a different and promising future. Only 26, or less than 10%, said that finding their fathers was a priority. Expectations varied widely, from college education (36%) to owning a beauty parlor. Some ambitious answers showed academic objectives—engineer, nurse, college degrees, and so on. Practical objectives included finishing school quickly and helping their mothers, getting an education, making money, learning to be a beautician, becoming an auto mechanic, learning English, and getting a good job. Other answers were less specific, talking about a happy and better life, freedom, and a better future (11%).

The Stay in the Camp

Before coming to the United States, Amerasians have spent time in the refugee processing center in the Philippines. The Office of Refugee Resettlement reported that 83% of the total 35,304 Vietnam departures went to the Philippine Refugee Processing Center (*Amerasian Update*, 1990). There they were enrolled in mandatory English language programs, cultural orientation, and work orientation. The length of stay was between six and seven months. In this short period of time, they underwent a “complete transformation.” Life in the processing camp was difficult for many of them. They talked about the lack of safety, and the problems in their new surroundings, specifically thefts, robberies, fights, rapes, and the need for bribery. Only a few mentioned that it was not too hard. They disliked the camp chores; many mentioned unfairness in the assignments and complained about having to do manual and

demeaning work. Only a handful found ways to make new friends in the camp. Some talked about the feelings of loneliness and openly expressed bitterness about being abandoned by their adopted parents once they found out the road to the United States was clear of any further obstacles. Uncertainty and frustration are the English words used to describe their feelings.

Impressions: Training Program

We asked for their impressions about the overall effectiveness of the training program. Almost 50% of the respondents said that it was helpful in providing them with information and understanding of American society. However, quite a few respondents explained that they could not concentrate because of the camp conditions. “I learn a few things,” one said. Others said that they had learned enough English to get around but still had many problems with English at school.

America: First Impressions

For many Amerasians (67%), America represented their hope after waiting many long years for a better life, a better education, and better opportunities. Some had plans for their career choice, others looked at ways to get a good paying job. The American society had been explained in the camps. However, when faced with the real America the situation was quite different. Accordingly the impressions of the different initial placement sites varied widely. There were those who felt positive and relieved, exclaiming, “It’s now my country” or “Now I can do something better for my life.” Some said they were very satisfied, happy, and felt very much at ease in the new environment. “I am feeling great and I really like California,” one said. Others showed mixed feelings and emotions: happy but lonely, feeling strange and confused, happy then sad, worried and lonely. There were also those who were really not at ease with the new

situation. They felt very sad and left out. They were afraid of the new society; a few went as far as to say that they were disappointed. Although many agreed that living conditions were much easier, there was still that uneasy and uncertain feeling about what would happen tomorrow.

This was an open-ended question, and answers were classified as “positive feelings,” “mixed feelings,” and “uneasy feelings.” The results were:

Positive	34%
Mixed	38%
Uneasy	25%
No response	3%

Feeling Nostalgic

Leaving behind part of the family was difficult for many of these young individuals. For many the maternal side provided all the support for those years growing up under very difficult conditions. The respondents talked about the sad feelings of leaving behind their grandmothers, their friends, and their relatives. The majority of the Amerasians in this survey still relied on the immediate support of the family with whom they came.

Present Educational Situation

To function in the new environment, Amerasians understood that six months of training was not enough education. Yet, for the time being, with very few resources available, the waiting time is often very long for getting into the different ESL and vocational training programs. For example, we found in our survey that 49 respondents (18%) said they were sitting idle waiting for available

English as Second Language slots to open up. Many complained about the time wasted at home waiting; others said that they had already forgotten what they learned in the camp.

Of the 275 respondents, 185 responded to the question of future plans. Nineteen (10%) indicated that they would pursue their education further at the college level. Twenty-three (12%) want to open their own business. Seventy-seven percent, or 143, plan to enter wage work—manicurist, mechanic, assembler, painter, welder, goldsmith, or beautician. Male respondents indicated their choice was auto mechanic and for the female respondents the preferred choice was beautician/manicurists. Ninety declined to answer, or didn't know.

Knowledge about America was astounding, particularly about work and business opportunities. Indeed, many respondents knew ahead of time what they would do in the United States and their choices reflected information they got from relatives in the United States or through the information available back home prior to their departure. In terms of self employment or salaried work, Amerasian respondents knew as much as the resettled refugees about what to look for in terms of job, business, and refugee programs supporting employment development or job training.

Another Layer of Support

During this initial adjustment process, it is important to not only have family support but also to know that someone is there to help you. When we asked about other relationships such as friends who could help at this stage many said that they had found someone at school, work, or in the refugee training program (70%). It was only through these activities that they met their friends or acquaintances. This provided another layer of support and advice. However, 83 (30%) gave “no” as their answer; they had established relationships outside of family.

Initial Adjustment Problems

Nearly half of the respondents indicated that they were having problems during their initial period of adjustment.

Yes, adjustment problems	32%
No	41%
No answer	27%

When asked about the nature of the problems, typical responses concerned housing conditions, food, transportation, or finances:

- My mom is very restrictive and does not understand me.
- I am so lonely at home.
- I don't have enough money to buy food.
- My mom is sick, I don't have any money.
- I sleep on the floor.
- My aunt is not treating me well.
- I lack everything.
- No money to go to school.
- Conflict with adopted parents or half-siblings.

Community Attitude and Reaction

Respondents were asked about their interaction with white, black, and Vietnamese communities; 245 gave responses. Eighty-one said they get along fine with all three communities. When talking about the Vietnamese community, 164 had mixed feelings, as shown in these typical responses:

- They are afraid of us Amerasians.
- They don't accept us yet.
- They get away.
- They are very superficial.

They scrutinize you.
They look at me funny.
They are not sincere.
They look down on us (“kình bi”).

There was not much contact with the majority American community aside from the professional help they received from the refugee workers. In general, when there was interaction, there was positive interaction and understanding. There were efforts from different agencies to facilitate contacts with the local community and get the Amerasians to participate in local activities. However, language remained the major barrier. Overall the majority community accepted these newcomers and they felt welcome in the communities. However, the American school experience was very frustrating for the Amerasians who because of their Caucasian or African appearance were sometimes expected to do better than their Vietnamese counterparts, even when they had had very little formal schooling.

The African American community has not interacted extensively with this new immigrant group. Their only contacts were at school where some friendship started. But there were problems in some high schools, where Afro-Amerasians were mistaken as “regular” African Americans and were harassed because of their lack of English language skills and their general appearance.

Tracing American Fathers

It is a commonly-held view that when Amerasians arrive in the United States, the first thing they do is look for their long-absent fathers and ask for compensation as well as recognition (Blundell 1985; Rudnik n.d.). In fact, in our findings, this was not the priority but one among the many tasks that eventually the new immigrant would like to accomplish.

The urge to find their fathers was a natural thing, but fewer than a dozen respondents said they had inquired about finding their fathers. There were many problems in starting the process. For most, there were no records or the records were destroyed during the final days of the war in South Vietnam. Those with information about their fathers found that the information was incomplete and had their letters returned. Some found that their fathers were killed during the war, and others found that their fathers had since remarried or already had a family. In such cases, the mothers would not make any further attempts to contact the fathers and encouraged their Amerasian children to forget it.

Since the first group of Amerasians arrived in the United States, there has been controversy regarding how to respond to Amerasian requests to search for their American fathers. In most cases, the local resettlement agencies became the first contact for tracing requests. However, these volags had little knowledge about how to go about tracing, nor did they know how to advise Amerasians who wished to trace their fathers.

When asked about the possibility of being reunited with their fathers, many answered that they would like to see and meet their fathers. Furthermore, with the extensive media coverage and stories of American fathers going to Vietnam to look for their children (even though this number is quite small), the hope of reunion continued to spark emotions and fostered a desire to look for their fathers.

A few respondents outright recognized that it would be futile to contact the father due to the many problems involved. Some possessed very scanty information, such as a first name of their father, or said that they once saw the picture of their father in full battle gear with a mustache. An overwhelming 82% of our respondents said that they have no record of their fathers and that even if they did have some documents, it was doubtful that these would amount to anything substantial in the search. They added however that it would

be nice and that it was worth all the difficulties that they had undergone if they could have a reunion and to talk about each other's feelings, catching up on all the lost years.

Reactions to Father's Responses

"I want to hold him for a long time and tell him that I missed him." This was one of the many answers from our respondents expressing their feelings. Only a few held expectations that the father would help in the initial stages of resettlement with guidance and moral support; very few hoped for financial help or complete involvement with their fathers.

The long wish for a face-to-face encounter, a reunion with the father, and being able to say something to him was the respondents' only dream. Many Amerasians did not have any other intention than to fulfill this simple wish. Yet, when faced with the difficult reality, they were sad but not angry; they were disappointed but it was not the end of the world. Many answered the question, "what if your father does not respond?" by saying that they would understand the situation and would not be angry but perhaps a little disappointed and sad. A few responded that they would try one more time to ask him to explain. Overall, the answers ranged from "it did not matter" to "I don't really know."

"Life goes on," many of them said when they responded to this

CAREERS SOUGHT:			
COLLEGE	BUSINESS	JOURNEYMAN	OTHERS
Nurse	Sewing shop	Painter	Navy
Engineer	Beauty salon	Welder	military police
Doctor	Tailor	Goldsmith	
Technician	Nail care	Plumber	
	Barber	Construction	
	Mechanic	Masonry	
	Hairdresser	Electrician	

question. Many have gone through so much that this disappointment would not remain long with them.

Future Plans

How do they see themselves five or ten years from now? The answers varied a great deal. There were those with very simple answers, such as “I will have some money to buy a car” to those who answered that they would be good United States citizens. In between were a wide range of responses. Some said they would own their own business; others said they would be in college finishing their senior year; some said they would be working and helping the family financially. There were some with a specific goal, such as becoming an engineer, a doctor, or a lawyer. A handful looked to the army and navy for career possibilities. There were also those who said that they did not really know, who felt quite uncertain about the future. However, more than half (54%) indicated they had a plan for the future that included employment as the first priority; of the remaining 46%, 34% declined to answer, and 12% had no plan in mind. Overall there was a sense of optimism and hope with the full understanding that it would not as easy as many had said at the Transit Center in Vietnam.

The majority were fairly certain about a stable life with positive feelings about the new country. Many felt their contributions will also be valuable as they talked about this vision: “I will not make a lot of money but I can be comfortable,” and “I’ll have a family and I’ll take them back to visit Vietnam. I still have many relatives there especially my grandmother. I want to see her and I miss her a lot,” or “it’s been a difficult life but I have some fond memories of Vietnam. It’s also my country.”

Chapter 6

DATA ANALYSIS

The Typical Amerasian

Based on our sample, the typical Amerasian was born between 1970 and 1972 in Saigon to a mother who worked for the military support system or for American military men. The father was Caucasian, and his relationship with the mother and child lasted for a period of time. The Amerasian attended school for 5 years, has basic literacy skills in Vietnamese, and knows no English. There was significant discrimination and harassment in Vietnam after 1975 due to mixed parentage or an obvious connection to the Americans. The emigration process began in Saigon, and took nearly seven years to complete. After receiving an exit visa, the Amerasian flew with 4 other family members to the Philippines to complete six-month English language and cultural orientation classes, and perform chores around the camp. When the training was completed, the Amerasian traveled to one of 55 cluster sites in America, with legal status as an immigrant, but eligible for resettlement services like a refugee. Chances are one in three that the family left the cluster site in another state for California. The Amerasian wants to go to work as an auto mechanic or a beautician, and hopes eventually to open a small business. While the Amerasian dreams of a reunion with an American father, the dream is tempered by realistic acceptance that it will never come to be. This refugee-citizen misses Grandmother, who played a significant role during the past twenty years, and the Amerasian hopes to visit her in Vietnam.

Living in the Shadows: Mother

It is not difficult to point to the problems that the mothers of Amerasians faced in their own society, but it is clear from our survey data that the majority of the women do not fit the negative stereotype that is often applied to them. Clearly, the mothers of Amerasian children did not all have a shady background nor did they all come from the lower classes, uneducated and poor. They were not the unwanted. They did not deserve the labels “bargirl” or “lady of the night.”

We found from our survey responses that the majority of the mothers of Amerasians did have a regular job and were employed in legitimate work. They worked alongside Americans. Many came from the countryside, not abandoning their family and village, but looking for opportunities in the more populated areas, their village rice fields unfarmable because of the war. Thus, for the survival of the family they left their villages and traveled to the cities, military bases, other urban areas in search of employment.

The American army operated in such a way that they required a great number of personnel to provide services. Their style of war required extensive logistical support. From purified water to sleeping quarters they brought the American standard of living to Vietnam. The Vietnamese workers made sure that these standards were maintained. It was not surprising to find large numbers of Vietnamese workers living in the proximity of the base or in the adjoining urban centers. They worked for the post exchange, the laundry service, the mess halls, and they worked as secretaries or translators. They also provided housekeeping for Americans who lived off-base. It was difficult to find work in regular Vietnamese businesses and usually they did not pay very much. It was very tempting to work for Americans. There were many extra fringe benefits, such as having access to the post exchange for goods, higher salaries, and befriending a high-ranking officer might provide access to facilities that were inaccessible to the regular crowd. In a country without a large

industrial base, the war provided job opportunities that in other countries were available in urban factories.

It was not difficult for relationships to blossom between people working and living in the same environment. Young servicemen left home for the first time to live in a faraway country with a different language and unfamiliar customs. In the midst of this loneliness, it was easy to begin a friendship with someone who was compassionate. Many women said that they met their American friend or husband after a period of time at work. Sometimes they met in social places such as the mess hall or the cafeteria. It is true that in the context of the traditional Vietnamese society, interracial relationships were frowned upon. However, parents were too far away to know or to care about the race of their daughters' friends. After all she was helping to feed the family. You could not ask for too much during wartime

Some of the relationships lasted as long as the tour of duty. Some American fathers volunteered for a second tour, and returned to Vietnam. Several went the extra step and legitimized their family. Others made arrangements to bring their Vietnamese wives and children to the United States. For those who returned to the United States for good and left their relationships behind, there were many different reasons. Yet, at no time were the soldiers blamed for the conditions that faced the mother and child. In the reports and news articles, many mothers thought it was the circumstances of the war that made everything so difficult. They did not suspect the sincerity of the father and they did not ask for reparation nor did they seek legal avenues to settle child abandonment issues. Perhaps the system was different in Vietnam or perhaps they did not know about legal avenues. Even then there were no negative feelings or remarks about the fathers. It is interesting to note that the mother in the video *The Story of Vinh* (1990), shown across the country on the Public Broadcasting System, who had a son named Vinh, an Amerasian young adult who found his way to the United States, responded,

when asked about the father, “He had very good manners.” There was not a single hard word about why he unexpectedly left her to return to the United States.

The Afro-Amerasians

It was our intention to see whether there were differences in experiences of Euro-Amerasians and Afro-Amerasians. We have selected a few of the Afro-Amerasian responses that highlight the differences suggested by the survey. As in many other Asian countries, relationships with a different race are discouraged. The darker the complexion the more difficult the tolerance. It is taboo for many Vietnamese to enter a relationship with a person of African descent. As predicted, their experiences in Vietnam were far worse. They had to face terms such as “con den” (black kid), “con den lai” (half-breed black kid) in the classroom and marketplace. With pronounced African features, these Amerasians faced enormous obstacles during their adolescent years and suffered a great deal of humiliation and discrimination. Some had to hide when visitors came; some had to look for ways to alter their features in order to look less African.

One would think that such unpleasant situations would not be repeated once the Amerasians arrived in the United States. However, they encountered a different set of problems here: looking African but not really being African. They were approached by their African American peers and due to the language problem could not conduct any meaningful exchange. Because their African American peers did not understand that they were Vietnamese, they gave the Amerasians a difficult time, shunning them and making fun of them. Neither were they accepted by their Vietnamese peers, because of the traditional norms about interracial relationships. Euro-Amerasians, while also the product of interracial relationships, were somewhat more easily accepted, probably because of prior experi-

ence with the children of Vietnamese-French relationships.

Amerasian Resiliency: Survivors

As discussed in each section related to aspirations and expectations, Amerasians possess many admirable qualities. For example, they have remarkable survival skills as shown by their strategies to get things done in Vietnam. With the right motivation and direction, their resiliency might well boost them to self-sufficiency. The Amerasians in our sample overwhelmingly expressed a desire to go to work.

Having to deal with many difficult situations, they are not shy in telling people what they think once a relationship is established. One of the surprising things we found in analyzing the responses was the openness of the respondents. Quite articulate, they wrote their feelings, gave examples, and used culturally appropriate expressions or metaphors to let us know their reactions to questions.

Chapter 7

CONCLUSION

The Vietnamese Amerasians as a group exhibit special needs that require resettlement and adaptation strategies different from earlier groups. From analysis of the data collected from the questionnaires, several key points about Amerasians have emerged. The most important point to note is that the image of a bargirl mother hanging on to the arm of a young American soldier, spending his money, the children of their relationship lacking in love and support from a complete family, is not the norm. This image has been reinforced by television reports and magazine articles that show the exceptional cases and demonstrate a lack of understanding of the deeper issues. We feel that this survey may help to change these misperceptions by putting forth a more balanced view of the mother, her children, and the extended family, with an emphasis on the grandmother. Other themes to emerge were that Afro-Amerasians and Euro-Amerasians have different obstacles to overcome in addition to adjusting to life in America, that Amerasians have had more education than previously thought, and that Amerasians bring with them a resiliency born of their experiences. Finally, we found that while the hope of a reunion with their American fathers is an appealing dream, most are aware that it is likely not to happen.

Based on the results of this survey, numerous informal talks, and discussions with professionals in the field and volunteers at the different cluster sites, we can make these recommendations:

1. *Mobilize the support of the Vietnamese community.* Adaptation should be a partnership. The community needs to get involved and cannot rely on resettlement agencies to perform the work. The reality is that with the dwindling dollar

amounts to each of the agencies, the level of service is not what it should be. Likewise, the American community groups' interaction and support is important, particularly African American groups.

2. *Provide programs based on the needs and backgrounds of Amerasians.* A comprehensive and specially designed program for resettlement should have practical objectives and clear goals. What are the characteristics of this new group? What are their transferable skills, and what do they need on a short-term basis? What can they do and where can they fit in the local job market? Should there be a special program joining the private sector and the resettlement agencies to work together with realistic goals to provide that first job? What can be done for the Amerasians who still need education, but are too old for public school programs? What are the successful models that can be adapted and adjusted to the needs of the Amerasians? A full range of activities must be available from the time of arrival, such as visits to local industries, education agencies, and an understanding of the services available to them. Evening sessions with local volunteers to talk about their respective areas of activity are helpful.
3. *Re-evaluate the cluster site program.* An ongoing support system particular to the needs of Amerasians is necessary, but sending them to sites isolated from other Vietnamese and other Amerasians is not the best approach.
4. *Employ bilingual personnel in the resettlement activities.* More than a decade after the first Vietnamese refugees, there is still a shortage of bilingual personnel in critical positions. Indeed, there are many people who are now fully bilingual

who could be asked to perform some of the tasks. We are talking about the young students at the various universities. At the University of California, Berkeley, a group of students, exposed to the situation and conditions of these fellow countrypersons, have become involved in the process by linking up with this group. Caroline Valverde, who is from a multiracial background, was the prime mover behind a group who brought Amerasians to campus and involved them in a number of activities. The results from these interactions were quite positive and a small number of these newcomers now look seriously into education as part of their future plans.

5. *Promote successful Amerasians in the media and by personal contact, so they can be role models to those who have come later.*

6. *Promote effective partnerships among the voluntary agencies, Vietnamese community agencies, and Vietnamese volunteer/religious organizations in the work of resettlement and adaptation. After some eighteen years of resettlement work, there are still problems in the cooperative relationship; each side tends to keep to themselves, not trusting the other. For example during our work with agencies, we found that competition for the dwindling social service dollar was fierce. When other non-profit organizations came into the picture, refugee agencies looked at them with suspicion and their first question was “Do they know what they are doing?”*

7. *Create an Amerasian Network or nationwide organization. One of the main benefits of this organization would be to allow communication and exchange of information between the different cluster sites and groups interested in reaching*

out to Amerasians. This organization could also be a main clearinghouse, staffed and operated by the Amerasians themselves with a focus on capacity building and networking. In brief, this would be “an organization by Amerasians for Amerasians.”

8. *Continue to collect information about the Amerasians, from California and across the nation.* Focus research efforts on the mothers of Amerasians, continuing to clarify their stories. Look into the role of the maternal grandmother in the lives of Amerasians. Find out more about the differences in Amerasians’ experiences based on the race of their fathers.

We learned a great deal during the three years working on this project. We are indebted to the many Amerasians for the many interviews. We are also grateful to the information gladly provided to us in the Philippines, in the hallways of American schools, and during the breaks at several Amerasian conferences and meetings. Our Amerasian friends have helped us understand the complexity of their experience and the challenges they have to face in making a new life in their fathers’ country.

Under the shadow of the mango grove, on benches, squatting in front of their little housing unit at Bataan, we asked them questions and then asked them for clarification. They told us what they knew and thanks to our mutual native language, we appreciated the nuances, the inner feelings, and the dreams that every one of them hopes to fulfill. They have been waiting for this opportunity for a long time. We shared our personal experiences in America. We cautioned them about their expectations. We told them to be practical. We hope they all will be successful in their resettlement.

We feel that the story of the Amerasians needs to be told and this is the primary moving force behind this study. Some have called the Amerasian movement “coming home,” and ironically the legislation

also used the term “homecoming” for the legislation’s name. We see this migration not as coming home but reconnecting with a missing part which may, if the conditions permit, come forward. Unfortunately, that missing part will never be found for the great majority of the Amerasians. We only hope that their experiences in America will be different from the ones in Vietnam and that they will receive support for building their future. It is only when those objectives are met that they can be fully resettled in every sense of the word. Perhaps at that time we will be able to suggest that the notion of homecoming makes sense.

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OTHER INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

After several years of resettlement work, there are many agencies well-equipped to receive as well as to place incoming immigrants in gainful employment. There are also a variety of resources already developed which are available. In this section are a number of resource for information that specialize in the specific resettlement of Amerasians. Since the beginning of this project we started to collect these materials as we came across them and they proved to be very useful. We are suggesting these to the readers.

Agencies

Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation
2100 M Street, NW, Suite 407
Washington D.C. 20037
(202) 828-2630

Migration and Refugee Services of the United States Catholic Conference
1312 Massachusetts Ave. N.W.
Washington D.C. 20005

Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services
360 Park Avenue South
New York, N.Y. 10010
(212) 532-6350

United States Catholic Conference
902 Broadway, 8th Floor
New York, N.Y. 10010
(212) 460-8077

Inquiries on Specific Amerasian Cases

Orderly Departure Program
American Embassy
Box 58
APO San Francisco 96346-0001

Lutheran and Refugee Services
122 C Street NW, Suite 300
Washington, D.C. 20001-2172
(202) 783-7509

Michael Kocher
InterAction
200 Park Avenue, #1115
New York, NY 10003
(212) 777-8210

Training Program for Amerasians

Jackie Spaulding, Director
Refugee Center
Catholic Charities
2911 South Fourth Street
Louisville, Kentucky 40208
(502) 367-4711

Questions about Tracing

International Social Services
American Red Cross
17th and D Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20006
(202) 639-3308

United States Department of State
Bureau for Refugee Programs
Room 5824
Washington, D.C. 20520
Attn: Ricki Gold

Anita Botti
Program Officer
United States Department of State
Bureau for Refugee Programs
Room 7245
Washington, D.C. 20520
(202) 663-1071

Published Materials on Amerasians

InterAction
Lutheran Immigrant and Refugee Services,
122 C Street N.W. Suite 300
Washington, D.C. 20001-2171
(202) 783-7509

In America
Refugee Service Center
Center for Applied Linguistics
1118 22nd Street N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20037

Amerasian Resettlement Program Cluster Sites & Lead Agencies

(InterAction, 1993)

Baton Rouge, Louisiana
Catholic Community Services
(504) 346-0660

Beaumont, Texas
Catholic Charities
(409) 832-7994

Boston, Massachusetts
International Institute of Boston
(617) 536-1081

Bronx, New York
St. Rita's Asian Center
(212) 365-4390

Buffalo, New York
Catholic Charities of Buffalo
(716) 842-0270

Burlington, Vermont
American Council for Nationalities Services
(802) 658-1120

Clarkston, Georgia
USA Ministries/World Relief
(404) 294-4352

Dallas, Texas

Refugee Services of North Texas
(214) 821-4883

Davenport, Iowa

Diocese of Davenport
(319) 324-1911

Denver, Colorado

Ecumenical Refugee Services
(303) 860-0666

Fargo, North Dakota

Lutheran Social Services of ND
(701) 235-7341

Garden Grove, California

St. Anselm's Immigrant & Refugee Community Center
(714) 537-0608

Grand Rapids, Michigan

Bethany Christian Services
(616) 245-7100

Greensboro, North Carolina

Lutheran Family Services
(919) 855-0390

Hartford, Connecticut

Catholic Charities
(203) 548-0059

Honolulu, Hawaii

Catholic Charities
(808) 528-5233

Houston, Texas

YMCA International Services
(713) 527-8690

Jacksonville, Florida

Lutheran Social Services of North Florida
(904) 632-0022

Johnson City, New York

USA Ministries/World Relief
(607) 798-1505

Kansas City, Missouri

Don Bosco Centers
(816) 421-0546

Lansing, Michigan

Catholic Social Services
(517) 484-1010

Lincoln, Nebraska

Catholic Social Services
(402) 474-1600

Los Angeles, California

Catholic Charities
(213) 251-3460

Louisville, Kentucky

Catholic Charities
(502) 637-9786

Memphis, Tennessee

Associated Catholic Charities
(901) 722-4777

Minneapolis, Minnesota

Lutheran Social Services
(612) 871-0221

Mobile, Alabama

Catholic Social Services
(205) 471-1305

Nashville, Tennessee

Catholic Charities
(615) 320-5422

Newark, New Jersey

Catholic Community Services
(201) 589-0300

New Orleans, Louisiana

Associated Catholic Charities
(504) 523-3755

Oakland, California

Catholic Charities
(510) 834-5656

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

Catholic Charities
(405) 232-8514

Orlando, Florida

Catholic Social Services
(407) 658-0110

Phoenix, Arizona

Catholic Social Services
(602) 997-6105

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Catholic Social Services
(215) 587-3909

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Catholic Charities
(412) 456-6999

Portland, Maine

US Catholic Conference
(207) 871-7437

Portland, Oregon

Lutheran Family Services of Oregon & SW Washington
(503) 233-0042

Richmond, Virginia

Catholic Diocese of Richmond
(804) 355-4559

Rochester, New York

Diocese of Rochester
(716) 546-7220

Sacramento, California

Lutheran Social Services
(916) 442-8200

Salt Lake City, Utah

Catholic Community Services of Utah
(801) 977-9119

San Diego, California

Catholic Charities
(619) 287-9454

San Jose, California

Catholic Charities
(408) 944-0362

Seattle, Washington

US Catholic Conference
(206) 340-0345

Sioux Falls, South Dakota

Lutheran Social Services
(605) 336-9136

Springfield, Illinois

Interchurch Refugee/Immigrant Ministries
(217) 522-9942

Springfield, Massachusetts

Roman Catholic Diocese
(413) 732-6365

St. Louis, Missouri

International Institute
(314) 773-9090

Syracuse, New York

Catholic Charities
(315) 424-1804

Tacoma, Washington

Catholic Community Services
(206) 383-3698

Tucson, Arizona

Amerasian Education & Employment Center
(602) 884-9765

Utica, New York

Mohawk Valley Resource Center for Refugees
(315) 738-1083

Washington, DC

Lutheran Social Services
(202) 723-3000

Yardville, New Jersey

Lutheran Social Services of NJ
(609) 585-0909

Crying Drops of Blood

By Chi D. Pham (Amerasian from Vietnam)

Translated by Trong Nguyen & Janice Finney

If lyrics could be worded to spell out two lines
of blood, the kids who have never known love.

It could be written
With whiskey sours, this taste
Of sadness, the truth in tears.
What possible version of poetry
Could be used to compare
Innocent souls? Smiles?
They come to our lips and
Burst with our tears, crying
Oh Mother! Where are you?
Oh Father! Are you
Just a breeze?

Who poured these pains over us?
Who can understand orphaned
Children, the foreigners who fathered us,
Diluted our blood and divided us
In half. Never have we felt
Fully human. Like wandering souls
Without relatives, we have
No temple, no offering.
Ghosts receive respect, we are greeted
With hate. People kick us
With pity back and forth.



Amerasian youth with others of his village, 1993.

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Folsom Cordova Unified School District
Rancho Cordova CA