

**Faculty of Humanities**

**From Both Sides of the Fence:  
Vietnamese Boat People in Hong Kong 1975 – 2000**

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**This thesis is presented for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
of  
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# Author's Declaration

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgment has been made.

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

**Human Ethics** The proposed research study received human research ethics approval from the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee (EC00262), Approval Number # RDHU-16-15

Signature:

A rectangular box containing a handwritten signature in blue ink. The signature appears to be "Henry Paul" written in a cursive style.

Date: 10/08/2018



# Statement of Contributors

The author acknowledges the contribution of an Australian Government Research Training Program Scholarship in supporting this research.



# Abstract

This thesis makes a contribution to anthropological and historical studies on refugees, asylum seekers and boat people.

Four decades ago, between 1975 and 2000, more than 213,000 Vietnamese boat people (VBP) sought asylum in Hong Kong (HK), of these 143,000 were resettled in other countries, more than 67,000 were repatriated to their country of origin and 1,368 were resettled locally. The seemingly never-ending arrivals of VBP, became known as the ‘Vietnamese boat people crisis’. The name exemplified the difficulty of finding resettlement, the financial burden, the riots and disturbances in detention camps, the legal challenges lodged by the VBP regarding the screening procedure, the illegality of detention, and the complex repatriation schemes: forced, voluntary and orderly.

The main objective of the research is to compile a comprehensive historical account of the VBP crisis in HK and consequently to identify lessons that can be learnt from the manner in which, the HK Government handled the 25-yearlong crisis. The study contributes to the existing literature on this subject, by inclusion of stakeholder voices that are missing in research to date: VBP, government officials, NGOs and local citizens.

To achieve its aims, the research utilised a grounded theory approach and oral history method. The outcome includes an exegesis and the website <http://www.vietnameseboatpeople.hk/>, which both address the same central research question and contribute to the knowledge of the history of VBP in HK, in different formats.

A main finding of the research is the need in all instances for international support to handle asylum seeking crises in the countries of first arrival. It has also shown the difficulties associated with detention as a deterrent.



# Acknowledgements

Doing the research, writing this exegesis and establishing the website (<http://www.vietnameseboatpeople.hk/>) have been a great journey and an immense learning experience for me, not only in the developed knowledge but also on a personal level. Firstly, I sincerely thank my participants for their willingness to open their hearts and share their stories and insights with me. I feel privileged to have had the opportunity to meet and interview them.

I wish to honour Dr Lee, who was 80 years old when I interviewed him for this study. Dr Lee was very generous in sharing his experience working with VBP. Sadly, three months after the interview, Dr Lee passed away. It was a great loss to his family and the community. This sad news, however, confirmed the importance of recording stories and experiences while the witnesses are alive and still remember the past.

I shall always be indebted to my supervisors, Dr Nonja Peters and Dr Dora Marinova. I am grateful for their guidance and continuous support throughout this journey. Dora's insights and feedback were invaluable. Nonja's knowledge and passion for the topic were instrumental, but it was her patience, enthusiasm and great sense of humour that kept me going. In addition, I would like to acknowledge Dr Kathryn Trees who was the first person to encourage me to embark on this research.

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Finally, my gratitude to my daughter Chiara, she was my ultimate motivation to finish this journey.



# Dedication

I wish to dedicate this research to those who are forced to flee from their own country, and in honour of the Vietnamese people who perished while searching for safety and freedom in the aftermaths of the Vietnam War.



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# List of NGOs

## **Non-Government Organizations provided different services to VBP**

AIHK – Amnesty International HK Section

BRC – British Red Cross

CARITAS HK - Founded in 1953 by the Catholic Diocese of HK to offer relief and rehabilitation services to the poor and the distressed

CFSI – Community and Family Services International

ESF – Ecoles Sans Frontieres

FPAHK – The Family Planning Association of HK

GSAC – Garden Streams: “Art in the Camps” Project

HKCAR – HK Christian Aid to Refugees

HKHSR – HK Housing Services for Refugees

ICRC – International Committee of the Red Cross

IOM – International Organization for Migration

ISS HK – International Social Service HK Branch

JRS – Jesuit Refugee Service (Australian Lawyer Project)

JVA – Joint Voluntary Agency

JP – Justice & Peace Commission of the HK Catholic Diocese

MSF – Medecins Sans Frontieres

NMS – Norwegian Missionary Society

OXFAM HK – Oxfam Hong Kong

PLAYRIGHT – Playright Children’s Playground Assoc. Ltd.

RCHK – Refugee Concern HK

REFUGEE RELIEF

ROTARY – Rotary International

TREATS – A HK registered charitable trust, founded in 1979, to work with any group of underprivileged children in HK by providing recreational opportunities

WRHK – World Relief HK Ltd



# List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

CFSI	Community and Family Services International
CPA	Comprehensive Plan of Action
CSD	Correctional Services Department
Disero	Disembarkation Resettlement Offers Program
ECVII	Ex-China Vietnamese Illegal Immigrant
FRS	Forced Repatriation Scheme
GIS	Government Information Services
HK	Hong Kong
HKSAR	Hong Kong Special Administrative Region
ICEM	Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration
IOM	International Organization of Migration
JP	Justice of the Peace
LegCo	Legislative Council
MSF	Medecins Sans Frontieres
NEZ	New Economic Zone
NGO	Non-Government Organization
ODP	Orderly Departure Program
ORP	Orderly Repatriation Program
RCC	Rescue Co-ordination Centre
RCHK	Refugee Concern Hong Kong
RSRB	Refugee Status Review Board
SCMP	South China Morning Post
UK	United Kingdom

UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioners for Refugee
US	United States of America
VBP	Vietnamese Boat People
VOLREP	Voluntary Repatriation Program

# Introduction

The date 30 April 1975 marked the end of the long drawn out Vietnam War when Saigon fell to the hands of the Communists from the North. In the aftermath, the world witnessed an unprecedented Vietnamese exodus, which involved over a million people fleeing their war-torn homeland. Most of them left by boat and soon became known to the world as ‘boat people’. Escaping on unseaworthy vessels and existing in inhumane conditions, many did not survive to tell their tale. On the open seas, they faced deadly storms, dehydration and starvation, failed engines, and pirate attacks. It was estimated that around one quarter of a million VBP died at sea by drowning, starving, illness or at the hands of pirates (Cartmail, 1983, p. 12; Chan, 2013, p. 116).

The Vietnamese boat people (VBP) sought refuge in Southeast Asian countries including Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and the (then) British colony of Hong Kong (HK). According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), between 1975 and 1995 a population of 796,310 VBP arrived in Southeast Asia.<sup>1</sup>

*At sixteen, I was among the nearly eight hundred thousands VBP who survived the treacherous seas journey. On 31 May 1979, together with 370 people, and my two little siblings, I left Vietnam on a 25-metre x 4-metre wooden boat. During the eight days at sea, we survived violent storms; we were chased by two groups of Thai pirates; we were shot, robbed and pushed back to sea by Malaysian military; three people on our boat died at sea due to exhaustion and dehydration, and more than ten died later*

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<sup>1</sup>Mark Cutts. The State of The World's Refugees 2000: Fifty Years of Humanitarian Action. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, 89.

*in a refugee camp. On 7 June 1979, we arrived at a fishing village in Indonesia. Our captain deliberately sank the boat to improve our chance to disembark. We were allowed to stay in the village for a week before the local Indonesian authority took us to an uninhabited island, named Jemaja, and left us there to survive without shelter, food, water or medicines. During the first three months, before the UNHCR found us, many VBP died of malnutrition and dehydration, malaria, diarrhoea and other diseases. In April 1980, my siblings and I left the island to resettle in the United States of America.*

In an attempt to record my journey, and to honour the VBP who did not survive their journey, I published my first book 'Boat People – Personal stories from the Vietnam Exodus'. This collection of stories is told by the survivors of this particular Vietnam exodus and those who helped us survive. The book led to my involvement in the oral history project, focusing on the history of the VBP in HK, which underpins this exegesis. The firsthand narratives from the people whom I had the privilege to interview and the archival and photographic research material I gathered from various sources, form the basis of this thesis which consists of an exegesis and a specially developed website.

Callan and Ardener (1984, p.10) claim that the research benefits even further when undertaken by a researcher who has undergone the same experience as the interviewee. They contend that 'examination of the personal as a construct for manipulation within social structures leads inevitably to consideration of its role in fieldwork itself' (Callan and Ardener, 1984, p.10). I consider my own personal experience as a Vietnamese boat person and refugee being essential to the research,

especially my awareness and understanding of the high levels of trauma the Vietnamese people had experienced before leaving the country, the risks involved when crossing the ocean in sea unworthy boats and the significant periods of severe deprivation waiting in the refugee camps and hoping to resettle in another country. For these life experiences have not only given me a broader understanding of the facts and emotions associated with dislocation, isolation and being stranded in limbo in a strange country that cannot be derived from professional training, it also helps avoids in Pierre Bourdieu's (1977, p.87) terms, 'the unnecessary separation of subject and analyst'.

The phrase 'From both sides of the fence' in the title is not meant to suggest that there are different sides to the same story, but rather that there are different narratives of the same history. Primarily, there were two groups of people – VBP and those who helped them. As the VBP in HK were separated from the local community by being kept inside securely fenced camps, there is little understanding about their experiences. On the other hand, the involvement and position of the HK people and officials who helped the VBP also need to be recognised and understood.

Vietnamese Boat People is the name of the website which represents the creative component of this PhD. It similarly relates to the narratives of both sides of the fence as it contains materials from VBP as well as from people who were interacting with them. The website is a rich depository of a lot of empirical data, including interviews, photos, artefacts, drawings, diaries and maps, which tell the stories of the individual participants in one of the longest migration sagas witnessed in recent world history. There are different ways of seeing, using and interpreting this prolific material. The

role of this exegesis however is to provide the academic interpretation of the events which occurred between 1975 and 2000 in relation to the VBP in HK.

The research question, which forms the basis of the PhD research is: How did Hong Kong respond to the 1975–2000 VBP crisis? My main aim in researching this issue is to provide a more comprehensive account of what had happened to HK and the VBP during the twenty-five years of this crisis. This can help identify lessons that can be learnt from the way in which the HK Government handled their dilemma and also contribute toward the preservation of this significant aspect of Hong Kong's history.

My goal is to contribute to the existing literature by adding the missing voices of the VBP while they sought asylum in HK, and the voices of people who affected the lives of the VBP. This goal is achieved through the two components forming the essence of the creative PhD, namely the website with the domain name: <http://www.vietnameseboatpeople.hk> and the discursive text referred to as the exegesis. These two components should be seen as synergistically related while maintaining their own integrity and using their specific ways of providing the answer to the research question. In other words, while being directly related, the exegesis does not explain or provide commentary for the creative component – the website, and vice versa – the website does not use the language of the exegesis to represent the history of the VBP.

The creative component of the PhD is a website which was developed specifically for the purpose of this research. Upon completion of the PhD studies, the UNHCR will become the permanent host of this website. This will allow for preservation of the

collected empirical material as well as for expanding the history of the VBP by adding the stories of those who sought refuge in other parts of the world, namely Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand.

This exegesis, which represents the written part of the thesis in order to elucidate a common response together with the website to the research question, includes four chapters. Chapter One comprises a summary of the history of VBP in Southeast Asia from 1975 to 1996, which gives the background to the study. Chapter Two presents a review of the literature relevant to the issues under study and describes the methodology, design and strategies applied to achieve the desired goals. Chapter Three comprises an inclusive account of the VBP crisis in HK, in chronological order from the time the crisis began in 1975 until it ended in 2000. In Chapter Four, I present my research findings, the lessons that can be drawn from the manner in which the HK Government handled the crisis, and my conclusion.

# **Chapter 1 : Background to the study - Summary of the history of Vietnamese boat people in Southeast Asia from 1975 to 1996**

This chapter presents a summary of the history of VBP in Southeast Asia from 1975 to 1996. In particular, it illuminates the complexity of the situation concerning the VBP who came to HK, which is the main focus of the research study. Being a former Vietnamese boat person myself, I have interspersed relevant aspects of my personal experience throughout the chapter in italics.

The boat people... robbed of their money, dispossessed of their homes, faced with privation in rural labour camps...are motivated simply by a desire to find freedom, ..., a remote elusive prize, for which all of them are prepared to risk their lives by embarking on a long perilous sea journey on overcrowded barely seaworthy vessels. At least half of them, it has been widely estimated, have lost their lives at sea in their bid for freedom (Keith St Cartmail, 1983, p. 8).

February 1975 marked the beginning of the Indochinese refugee exodus from Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia that, unforeseeably, lasted over two decades. From 1975 to 1995, a total of 1.5 million Indochinese refugees and asylum seekers took refuge in various countries in Southeast Asia; among them were some 840,000 Vietnamese (as cited in Chan, 2013, p. 5). See Table 1.1 for the statistics of VBP arrived in Southeast Asia and HK between 1975 and 1997.



For Vietnam, it began in April 1975, before Saigon fell to the hands of the Communists from the North. Although the long-drawn-out Vietnam War then ended, the suffering continued. In the aftermath, hundreds of thousands of people associated with the Government of South Vietnam or USA were incarcerated in prisons – commonly referred to as ‘Re-education Camps’ – without trial or sentence. Many died while in prison, from the cruel treatment. Some were kept there for as long as 18 years. According to W. Courtland Robinson (2000, p. 27), as many as 200,000 military officers and government officials were held for several years, and about 40,000 high-ranking officials and senior officers were imprisoned for up to twelve years or more. My father was one of them.

*He was at the time Chief of a Military Police Department in a province South of Saigon. Captured by the communists on 29 April 1975, he was kept in various prisons in the North of Vietnam for more than thirteen years. He never had a trial or a sentence. For thirteen years, we did not know if he was going to be released.*

While these men and women were imprisoned, their families also faced persecution. Their properties and possessions, including house, money, gold and other valuables that they had accumulated through many years of hard work, were confiscated. They were deprived of the right to employment and education. Furthermore, they were not allowed to operate their business. Many of them, including children and old people were forced to relocate from their urban homes to so-called New Economic Zones (NEZs) in remote rural areas.

Nghia M. Vo (2006) claimed “the NEZ system became a political means to get rid of unemployed or semi-employed people, traders; those who had capital; officials and personnel of the old regime; relatives of those undergoing re-education; the Chinese; and skilled machinery workers.” (p. 95). The demographer, Jacqueline Desbarats estimated that by early 1977, about 850,000 Vietnamese people from the city were sent to NEZs (cited in Robinson, 2000, p. 27). Predominantly comprised of uncultivated lands, NEZs were mosquitoes ridden with poisonous snakes and lacking in shelter, drinking water, food and sanitation. Facilities for healthcare, education and communication were non-existent. Life was extremely difficult for people who were not conditioned to hard labour. Many would not survive such poor living conditions and sickness, including malaria, diarrhoea, and skin diseases. Death rates were high, particularly among children and the elderly. Joe Thomas (2000, p. 51) also noted how rice and other crops produced in NEZs were collected and distributed to other parts of the country by the Government. The people who produced these crops were not allowed to sell them, if caught they would be punished. Those who escaped were penalized by jail terms, had their names removed from family registration books and were sent back to NEZs.

*Ten days after the communists took over South Vietnam, the Government seized all money from my parents’ bank account. They confiscated our house and appropriated my mother’s factory. After that, my mother was unable to obtain a job due to our father’s military background. Every few months my mother had to bribe the local authorities so that we could stay in our own town and avoid being sent to NEZ. Furthermore, my older sister and I could not attend senior high school because our father was in prison.*

Chan (2013, p. 41) claimed that after the fall of Saigon, in order to gain control over the economy of the South, the new communist government executed several currency reforms. The old money was to be exchanged for a certain amount of the new money. Not only these events caused many South Vietnamese to lose almost everything they had worked for, the impact also led thousands to commit suicide. According to Cartmail (1983, p. 21), during the first currency exchange event that took place in September 1975, about 15,000 people of Saigon took their lives due to fear of further harassment and feeling devastated by losing their life savings. By July 1977, it was estimated that 30,000 people had committed suicide.

*As I recall, on 21 September 1975, the night before the first currency exchange... the Government issued a curfew from 11:00 pm to 11:00 am the next day. It was announced on the radio that people were to return home and wait for important news from the Government. Starting at 2:00 am of 22 September, via the radio, the Government declared that between 11:00 am and 11:00 pm of the same day a mass currency exchange would take place throughout the entire South Vietnam. Each family was entitled to exchange 100,000 (dong) of the existing currency to 200 (dong) of the new currency for their daily use. After 11:00 pm the old money would no longer be useable.*

*Our family and most families, especially in Saigon would have had much more than 100,000 (dong) in our possession. Most people tried desperately to buy anything they could between 11:00 am and 11:00 pm with the excess money that would soon have no value, but there was hardly anything available to purchase. Merchants held on to their goods, including food, so they could sell them later, as everyone was aware that 200 new (dong) would not go far for a family. My mother managed to purchase one bicycle and a couple of shirts.*

*I remember how troublesome it was for my mother during that time. She had to care for seven young children, her elderly mother and her mother-in-law with so little money. Moreover, she was not allowed to keep her own business and could not obtain a job, because her husband was in prison for serving the previous government.*

In fear of persecutions at the hands of the communist government, about one million people fled Vietnam. Most of them left by fishing boats, often poorly equipped and overloaded. Depending on the region where they began their journey, Vietnamese refugees used two types of boats to escape. People who left from southern Vietnam used small fishing boats equipped with engines that might not sustain their journey. Their route began from the Mekong delta then across the South China Sea to Southeast Asia. Those who left from northern and central Vietnam crossed the Gulf of Tonkin and followed the coastline to HK, using primitive, ancient Chinese design junks.

The majority of VBP – 84 per cent – from southern Vietnam made landfall in Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia; the remaining 16 per cent, from central and northern Vietnam made their way to HK and the Philippines. Records from the UNHCR show that between 1975 and 1995, a population of 796,310 VBP arrived in Southeast Asia. During this period, Malaysia received the largest number of 254,495 VBP (Robinson, 2000, Appendix 1), and HK the second largest number at 213,302 (Chan, 2013, p. 116).

Studies also reported that many VBP had several failed attempts before they successfully made it out of Vietnam. About 70 per cent of them had tried to escape at

least once (Cutts, 2000). The main reasons for their failures were bad weather, poor coordination, dishonest organizers and being stopped by authorities. Escaping from Vietnam was considered a serious offence. If caught, people who tried to leave Vietnam illegally could face a prison term of up to 3 years and up to 20 years for the organizers (Thomas, 2000, p. 52).

*Between 1976 and 1979, my two siblings and I endured three failed attempts to escape from Vietnam. One time we were almost caught by the police near the beach in central Vietnam. The other two times we were cheated. People, who claimed they had a boat, took gold from my mother but the trips never materialized. We finally succeeded during our fourth attempt in May 1979.*

The host countries<sup>2</sup>, so-called first asylum countries, were countries in Southeast Asia and HK that permitted VBP to enter their territory and granted them temporary asylum while they were waiting for resettlement or repatriation. Meanwhile, these host countries received aid from the UNHCR to provide basic assistance to asylum seekers. The host countries included Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, the Philippines and HK.

The exodus of VBP occurred in a series of waves. The first wave took place between May 1975 and early 1977. Over this time, the average number of Vietnamese arrivals was a few hundred a month (Hitchcox, 1990, p. 71). The number gradually increased to an average of 1,500 per month by the end of 1977 (UNHCR, 2000, p. 82).

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<sup>2</sup> 'Refugee hosting countries' referring to those lower and middle-income States which have granted asylum to significant numbers of refugees. <http://www.unhcr.org/en-au/excom/standcom/4de4f7959/role-host-countries-cost-impact-hosting-refugees.html>

During the first few years of the exodus, the host countries accepted VBP with sympathy and had great concern for their dilemma. Many Western countries offered resettlements to VBP, the main ones being Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Sweden, the UK, and the USA. Neither did the host countries nor the resettlement countries predict that this situation would carry on for more than twenty years and that the numbers of people who were willing to risk their lives in a bid for freedom would grow into a million.

The second wave occurred between 1978 and 1979. Over this period, the Vietnamese communist government tightened its control over the people who were associated with the previous government of the South, and heightened hostility toward Chinese-Vietnamese. By the end of 1978, the number of VBP arrivals in HK and Southeast Asia had quadrupled (UNHCR, 2000, p. 82). According to K. G. Hughes (1985, p. 59), the monthly average of 1,500 in late 1977 had increased to nearly 6,000 a month in August 1978. In one week during the month of September 3,700 VBP arrived in Malaysia. The number of VBP arrivals continued to soar in 1979. Figures show 22,000 in March, 32,000 in April and doubled in May to 65,000. Richard Clark, U.S. Coordinator for Refugee Affairs commented the situation was an “absolute explosion” (Hughes’s (1985, p. 68).

Chan (2013, p. 22) claimed the number of VBP arrivals in Southeast Asian countries and HK climbed from about 62,000 in 1978 to more than 200,000 by mid-1979. This large increase prompted the Malaysian Government to implement a ‘push-back policy’. Robinson (2000) observed that while pushing back VPB resulted in a decline in the number of arrivals in Malaysia, it had concurrently created an upsurge of

Vietnamese refugees to Indonesia, by as much as 20-fold. In fact, their numbers grew from 2,800 in 1978 to almost 49,000 in 1979. The UNHCR reports also show that 51,422 people in 386 boats were pushed out of Malaysian waters in the first half of 1979 (Robinson 2000, pp. 42-43).

According to Bruce Grant (1979, p. 81), at least 500 boat people drowned as a result of Malaysia's push-back policy. It was noted that most of the people who were pushed out of Malaysian waters or shores ended up on isolated outer islands in Indonesia. By the end of July 1979, there were 33,000 VBP in camps on these islands. The boat my siblings and I travelled on was one of them:

*On 6 June 1979, our boat entered Malaysian water but was towed back to seas by the Malaysian military. The next day we ended up on an isolated Jemaja island in the Anambas archipelago of Indonesia.*

As the flow of boats from Vietnam kept increasing, Thailand also intensified its push-back activities. In June 1979, a spokesman for the Thai Navy admitted that 'several thousand VBP who intended to come to Thailand were towed back to sea' (Robinson, 2000, pp. 42-43).

A significant contributing factor to this sudden influx was the cleansing of ethnic Chinese from all over Vietnam by the communist regime. The outbreak of war on the Vietnam-China border also resulted in a surge of Vietnamese of Chinese origin to head for China. Starting in early 1977, the Vietnamese Government expelled Chinese residents in various parts of the North. Thousands of them were driven to places along the Sino-Vietnam boundary and were forced to cross the border. It started from several

hundred a day in early April to several thousand a day in May. By the end of May 1977, the numbers reached above 100,000 (“On Vietnam’s Expulsion of Chinese Residents”, 1978, p. 12). According to Cartmail (1983, p. 90) by the end of 1979, 262,637 Chinese-Vietnamese from northern Vietnam had crossed the border and migrated to China. The UNHCR donated US\$8.5 million to assist China to resettle these refugees on state farms in southern provinces (UNHCR, 2000, p. 82). This particular group of refugees later tried to seek asylum in HK. It was another hurdle that the HK Government had to overcome while dealing with the refugees that came by boat directly from Vietnam. Particulars of this situation will be presented in Chapter Three and Appendix 1.

In the South, due to growing rivalry between Vietnam and China in 1978, the Vietnamese Government closed down businesses owned by ethnic Chinese, confiscated their properties and forced them to leave the country or move to NEZs. On 24 March 1978, the Government sent 30,000 youth volunteers together with soldiers to Chinatown in Saigon (Ho Chi Minh city) to conduct house-to-house searches. Gold bars and American dollar bills were confiscated, properties were listed for state appropriation and businesses were closed down. By mid-June 1978, 16,000 ethnic Chinese had been relocated to three NEZs in different parts of South Vietnam. Subsequently, many thousand ethnic Chinese left southern Vietnam by boat to HK and other countries in Southeast Asia (Hughes, 1985, p. 5; Robinson 2000, p. 29).

Unlike the first wave of VBP, during the second wave, the host countries received boats that were bigger and carrying a much larger number of asylum seekers per boat.



In fact, in the hundreds, and many of these were ethnic Chinese, or Chinese Vietnamese. It is important to note that these large boats were in poor condition.

*My siblings and I left Vietnam during this second wave. There were 373 people on board and more than two-thirds were ethnic Chinese. It was a 25-metre wooden boat. There was hardly room for anyone to lay down.*

There is also documentary evidence that abandoned freighters were chartered by syndicates from Singapore, HK and Taiwan to transport people from Vietnam for a fee of ten to twelve taels of gold or about US\$2,000 per person (Robinson, 2000, p. 28). There is also proof that Vietnamese officials were involved with these syndicates in what was becoming a lucrative refugee transporting business. These syndicates organized for freighters/vessels to take thousands of people from Vietnam across the South China Sea and to countries that included Malaysia, Indonesia, HK and the Philippines. It appears, however, that these countries also often, refused to grant them permissions to land.

As observed by Sophia Suk-mun Law (2014, p. 3), the first case of ‘human freight’ to arrive in a Southeast Asian country was the uninsured 950-ton Honduras-registered freighter, the *Southern Cross*. It arrived in Malaysia in September 1978 with a human cargo of 1,252 Vietnamese on board. Because the Malaysian government would not allow them to go on land, the captain decided to drop his passengers on a reef off the Indonesian island of Pengibu.

Robinson (2000, p. 28) outlines similar cases, including the 1500-ton freighter, the *Hai Hong* from Singapore, which came to Vietnam in October 1978 to pick up 2,500 passengers. Its intended destination was HK, but bad weather forced it to go to

Indonesia instead. However, on 8 November, the Indonesian Navy forced the *Hai Hong* to leave its territory. Later that day the freighter reached Malaysia. After two weeks of back and forth between the Malaysian Government and the regional representative of the UNHCR, the passengers were allowed to disembark. Robinson (2000) states that these passengers had paid the syndicate a total of US\$5 million for their boat fare.

In late December 1978 another Panamanian-registered freighter, the *Tung An*, dropped anchor in Manila Bay. On board were 2,300 Vietnamese, 65 tons of fishmeal and 40 tons of raw rubber. The Philippines Government did not allow anyone to disembark until they received a confirmation of resettlement offers. Four months later, about half the passengers were able to leave the ship. The remaining half continued to stay on board until sometime in 1980 when they finally got to disembark (Robinson, 2000, pp. 28-30). Several of these 'human freights' also tried to land in HK (details of these incidents are included in Chapter Three and Appendix 1).

The third and final wave of VBP took place between 1987 and 1991. Following a five-year decline, the number of people leaving Vietnam was on the rise again. Law (2014, pp. 8-10) attributes the upsurge in numbers leaving Vietnam during this period to a series of natural disasters which she argues, damaged land and crops, and devastated the economy. Similarly, Hitchcox (2006, p. 98) suggested 'near-famine' condition in northern Vietnam was one of the reasons for the increase in number of VBP in the region.

During this time, a new escape route was also discovered. Many Vietnamese now went overland through Cambodia, where they would take a short boat ride from the port of

Kompong Som to the east coast of Thailand. This route was less dangerous because they could avoid the Cambodian border plus the dangers of an open-sea journey.

According to Robinson (2000, p. 183), at the end of 1987, the number of Vietnamese arrivals in Thailand – 12,000 – tripled the previous year's statistic. For HK, the figure soared from 3,400 in 1987 to 18,000 in 1988. By April 1989, the total number of VBP in various camps in HK and Southeast Asia was more than 100,000, the highest in ten years.

However, from a resettlement perspective it was bad timing for VBP. While the number of refugees escalated, the qualified resettlements possibilities declined. For example, in 1986, 80 per cent of the boat people being interviewed were qualified for US resettlement. By 1987, the number had dropped to below 50 per cent. Several contributing factors influenced the reduction of resettlement possibilities for VBP to countries out of Southeast Asia, these include an economic recession among some of the major Western countries together with an upsurge of refugees from Africa arriving at the European borders. Moreover, the number of asylum seekers who registered for resettlement in European countries increased five times between 1981 and 1986, bringing the number from 116,000 to 541,000 (Robinson, 2000, p. 179).

The Vietnam exodus persisted for more than two decades. It resulted in multiple losses of life and incurred expenses in the hundreds of millions of US dollars. However, the handling of this international crisis also created two 'ground-breaking' United Nations (UN) conferences on Indo-Chinese refugees that involved as many as 70 countries – the 1979 Geneva Conference and the 1989 Comprehensive Plan of Action (CPA).

## **1979 Geneva Conference on Indo-Chinese Refugees**

During the first couple of years of the exodus, the average monthly number of VBP arrivals was 500. However, between April 1977 and May 1978, the figure suddenly increased to 1,700 per month. The number of VBP arrived in Malaysia between 1978 and 1979 was up by more than ten-fold, from 5,800 to 65,000 (Chan, 2013, p. 120). According to David W. Harris (1994, p. 119) the inflow continued to escalate and peaked during the month of May 1979, about 18,700 VBP arrived in HK, 17,500 in Malaysia, 10,000 in Indonesia, 2,800 in Thailand, and smaller numbers landed in the Philippines, Singapore, Japan and Macao. Mr Talbot Bashall, who was the Controller at the Control Centre for the Vietnamese refugee camps in HK from 1979 to 1982, recorded in his personal diary that the highest number of VBP arrivals in HK in a single day at that time was 4,516 in 42 boats on 10 June 1979 (Bashall's diary, 1979; Chan, 2013, p. 120; Law, 2014, p. 29).

Overwhelmed by the influx, HK, the Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia, declared that they could not take any more VBP. Various host countries began to introduce deterrence measures to stem the flow of new arrivals, including turning away boats, reducing food allowances, lowering living standards in the camps and using force on boat arrivals. The deterrent austere camp policy established in Thailand made camp life for the existing refugees almost intolerable. It included keeping to a bare minimum the supply of food, medical care and shelter. Furthermore, it had the Thai Navy join forces with the Air Force spotter mission to tow incoming boats back out to sea. Similarly, on 15 January 1979, the Prime Minister of Malaysia announced that VBP would no longer be allowed to land in this country. During May 1979, Malaysia

expelled about 13,500 VBP from its shores (Robinson, 2000, 43). The UNHCR, in fact, claimed that thousands of VBP might have perished at sea as a result of push-backs (UNHCR, 2000, p. 83).

This grim reality prompted the US Government and the British Prime Minister to initiate an international conference to seek some solutions to what the High Commissioner of UNHCR called 'A grave crisis exists in South East Asia' (UNHCR, 2000, p. 86). A direct effect was the special UN conference on Indochinese refugees, known as the Geneva Conference which took place in Geneva on 20–21 July 1979. It was attended by 65 nations. The outcomes of the conference include: an agreement from the international community to provide resettlement for 260,000 refugees; an agreement from Vietnam Government to discourage illegal departures and to implement an Orderly Departure Program (ODP) allowing legal emigration from Vietnam for family reunion and other humanitarian cases; and a pledge of US\$160 million to aid the UNHCR, which was more than double the total amount of the previous four years (The Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, 1989. P. 8).

It was apparent that the international community stepped up its commitments considerably to achieve the goals that were set at the conference. It was noted that the United States offered the highest resettlement numbers and Japan was the largest financial donor. After the conference, the VBP arrivals declined and the number of ODP departures increased. According to Robinson (2,000, p. 173), in 1980, the number of people who left by boat was 71,400 and in 1982 it dropped to 43,800. Meanwhile, the number of people who left legally under the ODP was 4,700 in 1980 and this increased to 10,000 in 1982. Robinson's records also show that in 1984, for the first

time, the number of clandestine departures having dropped below that of ODP departures – 24,865 verses 29,100 (Robinson, 2000, p. 173).

## **Anti-Piracy**

Piracy in the Gulf of Thailand dates back to the sixteenth century. However, only since the Vietnam exodus did piracy became an internationally recognized endemic. This resulted from reports about the numerous callous acts committed by fishers in the South China Sea against defenceless Vietnamese refugees.

The pirates murdered, raped, robbed, tortured and abducted their victims who were often both frightened and exhausted. Moreover, Thai authorities were turning a blind eye to this dilemma as the pirate attacks also served to deter some boats from coming to Thailand. There were, in addition, reported incidents where the attackers were Thai policemen. Cartmail (1983, P. 112) described a particular incident of a fishing boat carrying 30 Vietnamese refugees that was stopped by a Thai patrol vessel in May 1978. The policemen boarded the boat, threaten the refugees with guns, robbed them of their valuables and then raped the women and girls, including a 12-year-old girl. Afterward, the police fired on them with assault rifles and ordered them to leave Thai waters. My siblings and I too experienced an assault on our boat as it neared Malaysia:

*Nearly one week at seas, we survived violent storms and successfully eluded two groups of Thai pirates. On the sixth day as we entered the waters of Malaysia, Malaysian military men from the shore fired at our boat to stop us from coming closer. They towed our boat out to seas, boarded our boat, conducted a thorough search, threaten us with guns and took our navigating tools and other valuables*

*including money, jewelleries and gold. At one point, a soldier pointed his M-16 rifle at my younger brother to demand his gold necklace. Afterward, they cut the towing robe and told us to leave Malaysian waters.*

Archival records confirm that thousands of VBP in distress were rescued in the South China Sea. However, UNHCR records show the number of rescues during 1979, was much lower than in previous years. From 1975 to 1978, 110,000 VBP arrived in South East Asia and 186 boats were rescued whereas during the first half of 1979, more than 177,000 VBP arrived in the region and only 47 boats were rescued (UNHCR, 2000, p. 87). Furthermore, rescues of VBP between 1975 and 1978 were made by ships from 31 countries while in 1979 most of the rescues were made by ships from only three countries: Norway, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom.

Contrary to the swelling number of boat people and growing pirate attacks, the rescue of boat people in distress at sea, by passing vessels, reduced significantly. Long delays and financial loss from disembarking the refugees had discouraged ship captains from responding to distress calls. As Robinson (2000, p. 192) indicates, the delays could cost commercial ships from between US\$10,000 to US\$90,000 per day.

In August 1979, the UNHCR established the Disembarkation Resettlement Offers Program (Disero) to encourage merchant ships to continue to rescue boat people in trouble. Under this program, a number of countries including the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, France, Germany, Sweden and Switzerland agreed to guarantee resettlement within 90 days for any Vietnamese refugee rescued at sea.

This program promised merchant ships prompt disembarkation at the next port of call after rescues were made.

It was however, not until 1981 that statistics of pirate attacks on VBP were officially recorded. The first record shows an average of 77 per cent of all arriving boats had been attacked at least once. As reported by refugees from two Thai refugee camps, in 1981, of 452 Vietnamese boats arriving in Thailand, there were 1,122 attacks on 349 boats. According to Cartmail (1983, p. 115), May 1981 was the worst month, of the 99 boats that departed from Vietnam carrying 3,354 refugees, 75 were attacked as many as 210 times. The UNHCR records also show that a total of 881 people were listed as dead or missing, 578 women had been raped and 228 women and girls had been abducted (Robinson, 2000, p. 166). This crisis prompted some international mercy ships to deploy rescue missions, including the *Cap Anamur* and the West German vessel *Ile de Lumiere*, with the support of Medecins Sans Frontières. Together, these organisations rescued thousands of VBP in the South China Sea.

Norman Aisbett, a former journalist of the *West Australian* newspaper joined the *Cap Anamur* on one of its rescue missions in the South China Sea for nearly three weeks in late August 1981. Aisbett described how what he witnessed 'had marked his life forever' (Hoang, 2010, p. 184). He recalled at one point, how they came upon five Thai boats gathered around an 8-meter Vietnamese refugee boat that had been carrying 92 men, women and children. The Thai fishers took twenty-two women and thirty-three children to their boats and left the Vietnamese men on their leaking craft with failed engine. After a period of stand-off, the women and children were released to the



*Cap Anamur*. During this trip, the *Cap Anamur* picked up 695 VBP and transported them to a refugee camp in the Philippines (Hoang, 2010, p. 185).

In May 1980, UNHCR donated a US\$160,000 speedboat to the Thai Navy for actions against pirates in the Gulf of Thailand. However, that did not seem to abate the situation. Growing international outrage prompted the US government to fund the Royal Thai Navy US\$2 million for anti-piracy effort in February 1981 (The Lawyers Committee for Human Rights (1989, pp. 83).

According to Robinson (2000, pp. 166-169), in 1981 the anti-piracy taskforce involved air-sea surveillance. Two spotter aircrafts and a coastguard cutter were purchased. However, within eight months, the program not only ran out of money, it had also been proven to be over-committed. Over this period, 25 fishers were arrested, and 180 boat people were rescued from pirate attacks.

By the end of 1981, the UNHCR had launched an international appeal for an anti-piracy program. However, there were delays due to a monetary demand from the then head of Thailand's National Security Council of nearly ten times more than the raised amount. Finally, in June 1982, an anti-piracy operation began with US\$3.6 million funded by twelve countries. This program enabled the Thai Navy to purchase additional fast patrol vessels and equip fishing boats with powerful motors to use as bait. The Thai Harbour Department was also given a boat and computer to register 13,000 Thailand's fishing boats. It was the first time Thailand had a record of its fishing fleet. Moreover, with these records it would be far easier for the authority to track down the fishing boats in question.

Statistics from UNHCR in 1982 and 1983, demonstrate that the numbers of boat attacked by pirates dropped slightly as a result of the anti-pirate efforts but that the percentage of people killed or abducted was higher. The Lawyers Committee for Human Rights (1989, pp. 78-83) argued that in the beginning the program had very few successes. They claimed that nearly three of every four boats that arrived in southern Thailand between 1981 and 1984 had been attacked at least twice. Between 1980 and 1983, their records show that 1,376 boat people had been murdered, 592 women abducted, and an additional 2,283 women raped.

The Disero program established by the UNHCR in 1979 was effective initially, but gradually declined. Fear of pirate attacks and expensive delays in ports to disembark rescued boat people, continued to discourage ship captains to rescue boats in distress. Boat people who reached shore on their own, told of being repeatedly passed by ships. The UNHCR statistics indicated a drop in the number of boat people rescued from 21 per cent in 1981 to as low as seven per cent in 1984 (Harris, 1994, pp. 129-130).

In an effort to solve this issue, on 1 May 1985, the UNHCR launched a Rescue at Sea Resettlement Offers (RASRO) Program, with supports from thirteen countries. The participating countries pledging 2,500 resettlement places for refugees picked up by commercial vessels and private mercy ships. Six months after commencing the program, the number of boat people rescued at seas reportedly had doubled the figure in 1984 (Harris, 1994, p. 130).

According to Robinson's research (2000), during 1984-1985, the US Congress approved a fund of US\$10 million to support anti-piracy efforts, over and above the contributions that the US already allocated to the UNHCR. A portion of the fund was

used to reimburse ship owners for the cost of rescuing boat people (Robinson, 2000, p. 169).

As the years passed, although the number of boats attacked continued to decline, the level of violence escalated, and rapes and abductions also increased. This trend persisted for at least another five years. Records show 500 people were reported dead or missing in 1988 and 750 in 1989 (Robinson, 2000, p. 170). During an interview with Henry Kamm, journalist of *The New York Times*, Poul Hartling, the High Commissioner said: “Even if the quantity has gone down, the quality of the attacks, if you can say that, is going up... [and they] tell of cruelty, brutality and inhumanity that go [way] beyond my imagination.” (Robinson, 2000, p. 169).

Some experts argued that the success of the anti-piracy program had contributed to this grim reality. It was explained that the anti-piracy efforts had ‘scared off the occasional opportunists, leaving behind a hard core of professional criminals’ and that they also tried very hard not to leave any witnesses (Robinson, 2000, pp. 169-171). According to the UNHCR statistics, from 1975 to 1990, in total, 67,000 VBP were rescued at sea (UNHCR, 2000, p. 87).

The influx of VBP in 1979 was the reason for the first Indochinese refugees conference, known as the 1979 Geneva Conference. A decade later, another influx of VBP formed the grounds for the second Indochinese refugees conference, known as the 1989 Geneva Conference.

## **1989 Geneva Conference – the Comprehension Plan of Action (CPA)**

In 1989, the upsurge of VBP once again presented an international humanitarian crisis. By April 1989, the total number of VBP in first asylum camps reached more than 70,000, the highest in ten years (UNHCR, 2000, p. 84). In fact, the number of VBP arrivals began to climb in early 1987. Reports from the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights (1989, p. 65) show that by mid-1988, the remaining number of VBP in HK was 25,000; 15,000 in Thailand; 14,000 in Malaysia; 4,000 in the Philippines; 3,000 in Indonesia and 600 in Macau. In 1988, 11,000 VBP arrived in Thailand, tripled their figure of the previous year. In 1989, more than 18,000 VBP came to HK, it was the highest number since the first influx in 1979 (UNHCR, 2000, p. 82).

This second influx happened at the time when the rate of arrivals far exceeded the rate of resettlements, western countries grew more reluctant to offer as much opportunities to VBP as they did in the past (Thomas, 2000, p. 83). The large number of long-stay VBP in camps and the sudden upsurge in new arrivals had, once again, driven first asylum countries to reinforce their deterrent policies.

Aggression toward asylum seekers in Southeast Asia worsened. Thailand announced that all VBP who arrived after 27 January 1988 were to be classified as “illegal aliens” (the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, 1989, p. 90). On 21 April 1988, Malaysia gave notice that its refugee centre, Pulau Bidong, would be closed in one year. In June 1988, HK also announced that all VBP who arrived after that date would be treated as illegal immigrants. As stated in the report from the Lawyers Committee for Human

Rights (1989, p. 90), 'hostility spread as the Governments of Thailand, HK and Malaysia engaged in a grim competition to shift the burden elsewhere'.

The announcement from the Thai Government of the push-back policy caused much suffering for the boat people arriving on the coasts of Thailand. Cartmail (1983) argued that a direct consequence of sending more boats back to sea was an increase in pirate attacks on VBP. The UNHCR reported that within six weeks, more than 1,500 boat arrivals had been push backed and 'some 170 refugees have lost their lives directly as result' (Lawyer Committee for Human Right, *Refugee Denied, 1989*, p. 6). The Lawyers Committee claimed:

The push-back policy has also inspired a rash of piracy incidents, unmitigated in their violence and cruelty. Hundreds of Vietnamese have been raped, robbed and murdered by Thai fisherman. In addition, Thailand's refusal to allow VBP to disembark from freighters who have rescued them at sea is unacceptable (Lawyer Committee for Human Right, *Refugee Denied, 1989*, p. 6)

In addition to pushing back the boats, several refugee host countries introduced cut-off dates as another form of deterrence. All new Vietnamese boat arrivals after the cut-off date were required to undergo a screening interview. If qualified as refugee they could stay to apply for resettlement, otherwise, they would have to return home. The cut-off date for refugee for Malaysia and Thailand was 14 March 1989, Indonesia was 17 March 1989 and the Philippines was 21 March 1989. It was noted that the cut-off date in HK was 16 June 1988, nine months before other host countries (Robinson, 2000, p. 187).

A significant cause of this upsurge of VBP was the breakdown of the ODP, the program established at the 1979 Geneva Conference that authorized those who wish to leave Vietnam and settle in foreign countries. The disruption began when Vietnam suspended the program on 1 January 1986. Robinson (2000) explains that right from the beginning, executing the ODP between the US and Vietnam was complicated due to hard negotiations on the processing guidelines. In principle, the basis of the program was for 'family reunion and other humanitarian cases' (p. 56), and the candidates would be selected from lists prepared by the Vietnamese Government and the receiving countries. From late 1979, the US and Vietnam began exchanging their lists of Vietnamese who potentially met the criteria of the program. However, the lists were distinctly different. The Vietnamese list had 21,000 names, most of them ethnic Chinese and others with medical problems. The US list had 4,000 names, mostly people with family links in the US and former employees of the US Government. After eighteen months of back and forth, in December 1980, the first group of 1,700 people departed for the US under the ODP. Since then, the numbers steadily increased to 30,000 in the year 1985. However, in December 1985, there was a backlog of 22,000 people still waiting for departure after they have been interviewed. Vietnam announced a halt on more interviews until the problem was resolved.

This drastic upturn in the inflow of VBP caused the second International Conference, which was also held in Geneva from 13 to 14 June 1989. Over 70 governments attended this conference. The outcome was the signing of the multilateral Comprehensive Plan of Action (CPA) on Indochinese Refugee. This plan included a program to provide safe and orderly ways for people to leave legally, temporary protection for new arrivals in host countries in Southeast Asia, resettlements of all

refugees in resettlement countries and help for those found to be non-refugees to return to Vietnam with financial assistance and counselling for their reintegration in their native country.

The main objectives of the CPA were to include:

1. Reducing clandestine departures through information campaigns and through increased opportunities for legal migration under the ODP;
2. Providing first asylum to all asylum seekers until their status had been established and a durable solution found;
3. Determining the refugee status of all asylum seekers in accordance with international standards and criteria;
4. Resettling those found to be genuine refugees in third countries as well as all Vietnamese who were in first asylum camps prior to March 1989; and
5. Repatriating those found not to be refugees and re-integrate them in their home countries.

(Office of the UNHCR. *Information Package on The Comprehensive Plan of Action on Indo-Chinese Refugees*. A.C.T. Australia: UNHCR, 1995).

The success of CPA depended on the involvement and commitment of all parties. Jean-Pierre Hocke, the High Commissioner of UNHCR (1986-1989), referred to the role of the CPA as providing ‘balance and compromise between various parties’ (cited in Law, 2014, p. 5). Sadako Ogata, the High Commissioner of UNHCR (1990 – 2000) described it as responsible for ‘a burden-sharing arrangement’ (cited in Law, 2014, p. 5). Six years after the adoption of the CPA, UNHCR reports indicated that clandestine departures from Vietnam had stopped; more than half a million Vietnamese had left the country under the ODP; more than 120,000 persons had been screened; over 80,000 VBP resettled; and more than 73,000 persons had been repatriated to Vietnam (Office of the UNHCR, p. 2). See Table 1.2 for the figures of Vietnamese who left the country under the ODP between 1975 and 1997.

The formal ending of the CPA was on 30 June 1996. The year 1996 also marked the end of the VBP history in Southeast Asia. Even so, many activities carried on post-CPA. The program finally came to an end on 30 June 1997, when Britain handed the HK territory over to China. For HK, the VBP saga was not, in reality, over until the last refugee camp on Pillar Point, closed in May 2000.

## **Research Perspective**

The history of VBP, effectively, is a global history. It involved countries that offered settlements to VBP, countries that gave financial supports to help relieve the burdens to those involved and last but not least, countries that served as first port of asylum.

It is evidenced that HK played a significant role in the VBP history. The summary of the history of VBP in this chapter demonstrates that the movements of the VBP in and out of HK were affected by the dynamics in the whole region throughout its entire history. Knowledge of the situation of VBP in neighbouring countries and the international responses to the crisis is essential to the understanding of the history of VBP in HK. It provides some fundamentals and explanations to why things happened as they did.

The next chapter highlights some of the literature that reflect the issues of VBP in HK and explains the methodology adopted for this research.



**Table 1.1. Arrivals, Resettlements and Repatriations of VBP (1975 – 1997)**  
**Source: UNHCR**

<b>Countries /Territories of First Asylum</b>	<b>Arrivals of VBP (number)</b>	<b>Arrivals of VBP (%)</b>	<b>Resettlements</b>	<b>Repatriations</b>
<b>Hong Kong</b>	195,833	24.6%	138,545	66,696
<b>Indonesia</b>	121,708	15.3%	111,876	12,672
<b>Japan</b>	11,071	1.4%	10,350	1,300
<b>Korea</b>	1,348	0.17%	1,387	0
<b>Macau</b>	7,128	0.9%	7,708	0
<b>Malaysia</b>	254,495	32%	248,781	9,130
<b>Philippines</b>	51,722	6.5%	49,559	2,502
<b>Singapore</b>	32,457	4.1%	32,364	106
<b>Thailand</b>	117,321	14.7%	108,121	11,751
<b>Other countries</b>	3,227	0.4%	3,486	101
<b>Total</b>	<b>796,310</b>		<b>712,177</b>	<b>104,258</b>

**Table 1.2. Resettlements of VBP and Departures under Orderly Departure Program (1975 – 1997)**

Source: UNHCR

<b>Countries of Resettlement</b>	<b>VBP</b>	<b>Orderly Departure Program</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Australia</b>	108,808	46,711	155,519
<b>Belgium</b>	1,729	3,106	4,835
<b>Canada</b>	100,012	60,285	160,297
<b>Denmark</b>	4,592	2,298	6,890
<b>Finland</b>	1,813	736	2,549
<b>France</b>	21,421	19,264	40,685
<b>Germany</b>	15,489	12,067	27,556
<b>Japan</b>	6,388	1,757	8,145
<b>Netherlands</b>	7,332	1,980	9,312
<b>New Zealand</b>	4,476	1,140	5,616
<b>Norway</b>	5,950	3,998	9,948
<b>Sweden</b>	5,857	3,079	8,936
<b>Switzerland</b>	5,814	1,064	6,878
<b>United Kingdom</b>	19,329	4,842	24,171
<b>United States</b>	402,382	458,367	860,749
<b>Others</b>	6,526	2,815	9,341
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>717,918</b>	<b>623,509</b>	<b>1,341,427</b>

## **Chapter 2 : Literature Review and Methodology**

This chapter presents a review of the literature relevant to the issues under study and explains the methodology and theoretical framework chosen for this research.

### **2.1 Literature Review**

The Vietnam Exodus began after the Vietnam War ended in April 1975, when over a million Vietnamese people left the country, primarily, by boat to seek asylum elsewhere. Unexpectedly, the Vietnam Exodus also formed a significant part of Hong Kong's immigration history. Over a 25-year period, 1975-2000, more than 213,000 VBP sought temporary refuge in HK, of which 143,000 were resettled in other countries and more than 67,000 were repatriated through volunteer and forced repatriation programs ("Wave goodbye to the money, Hong Kong", 1998).

While maintaining order in their society and managing their own people, the HK Government gave refuge to nearly a quarter of a million VBP. The Government received, quarantined and housed them, provided them with food and medical treatment, and managed, processed and assisted with their resettlement on a daily basis.

The complexity of the Vietnam Exodus has drawn attention from many scholars. A number of studies on the topic of VBP had been undertaken. The main contributors to early research on VBP in host countries in HK and Southeast Asia include: Grant,

1979; McGowan & Stone, 1980; Haskin, 1980; Nhat Tien, Duong Phuc, Vu Thanh Thuy, 1981; Cartmail, 1983; Feith, 1988; Carlyle, 1989; Hamm, 1995; W Courtland Robinson, 1998; Cargill & Huynh, 2000; Thomas, 2000; Freeman & Nguyen, 2003; Nguyen, 2005; Vo, 2006; Lee, and C.-s. S., & 李靜思, 2006.

In addition, there were studies focusing specifically on the VBP in HK. However, most of them are predominantly about the overcrowding and poor conditions in the camps, the violation of basic human rights by the HK Government, the changes the VBP presence engendered in HK immigration policies, and the riots in detention camps. And the most relevant of these early studies are those carried out by OXFAM, 1986; Knudsen, 1990; Lam, 1990; Wolf, 1990; Davis, 1991; PoKempner, 1992; Bun, 1995; Gaston, 1995; Thomas, 2000; Chang, 2003; Lee, 2006; Chan, 2013 and Law 2014.

More recent literature concerning the history of VBP in HK includes Thomas, 2000, Chan, 2013 and Law, 2014. Their areas of interest are more extensive than previous research, and their approaches to this history also differ from other scholars. In the rest of this chapter I refer to these three main sources of analysis and statistics in order to identify the prevailing themes covered in recent research on VBP.

My main aim is to investigate all aspects of the VBP crisis in HK from the beginning to the end and to produce a comprehensive record of the crisis and not just specific aspects as previous researchers have done. My original research, contribution to the existing literature is adding the voices about the experiences of the VBP who sought asylum in HK, and the voices of the people who most influenced their lives. These

voices are missing in extant research. Before I do this, it is important to identify the main aspects already conceptualised and the gap, which this study fills.

## **2.2 Key Themes**

Recent research on VBP, and particularly the works of Thomas (2000), Chan (2013) and Law (2014), provided a detailed examination of the HK situation. The thematic analysis of the issues covered in these publications identifies the following dominant themes, namely: drivers pushing Vietnamese people to leave their homeland; conditions in the camps in HK; violence and riots in the camps; refugee resettlement; and implications for children in the camps. They are discussed in turn below.

### **A. Drivers pushing Vietnamese people to leave their homeland**

The reasons behind the decision to escape from Vietnam and to undertake a life-threatening journey to an unknown destination were certainly multiple and complex. While the British HK Government differentiates the VBP into two main categories – political refugees and economic migrants, **Joe Thomas** (2000) reveals in his publication “*Ethnocide: A Cultural Narrative of Refugee Detention in Hong Kong*”, the numerous social, cultural and political reasons that prompted the Vietnamese people to leave their homeland. According to Thomas (2000, pp. 43-44), some of the causes for leaving Vietnam that were reported by the VBP when they arrived in HK include: to avoid military draft; the desire to re-join family members abroad; to escape from re-education camp; to escape the New Economic Zone; not able to practice their profession; unable to practice a particular religion; deprived of education or identity cards; and the fear of persecutions.

**Sophia Suk-mun Law**'s most recent 2014 study about the history of VBP in HK is the publication "*The Invisible Citizen of Hong Kong*". Among other aspects of the VBP crisis in HK, Law's book also gives insight into the causes pushing Vietnamese people to leave their homeland in which she includes statistical information about arrivals and repatriation. The perspective Law (2014) takes differs from that of Thomas (2000) and Chan (2013) informs the approach taken in this thesis. While Thomas (2000) and Chan (2013) argue that the political oppressions from the Vietnamese communist regime was the main driver which initiated the Vietnamese people's decision to escape and to seek asylum in HK, Law (2014, p. 17) explains that environmental disasters was a significant factor in generating different categories of refugees from Vietnam that arrived in HK, given that eighty per cent of them were farmers or fishers. Without diminishing the impact of the communist regime and political persecution, Law (2014) outlines as additional factors that forced people to leave their livelihoods: the exodus of farmers, whose departure had been partly driven by extreme weather events such as on average, the seven tropical cyclones hitting Vietnam each year causing major damage to lands, crops and communities. Coupled with the harsh political environment and the government's inability to cope with natural disasters, Law (2014, p. 8) believes that these circumstances left many Vietnamese with no other choice than to leave their country (p. 8).

Law (2014, pp. 9-10) contends that there was a direct relationship between natural disasters in Vietnam and the increase in VBP flows to HK. For example, HK received the largest annual arrivals of VBP in 1979, following a severe drought, a series of floods and powerful typhoons in 1978 which devastated Vietnam's economy and all types of infrastructure. Similarly, at the end of 1988, the country was hit by three catastrophic typhoons that caused nearly a thousand deaths and affected more than 6

million Vietnamese. Consequently, by early 1989, the number of new VBP arrivals in HK reached the highest level in ten years.

Emphasising the connection between population movement and natural disasters brings another perspective on the Vietnamese crisis giving it a global perspective. It was not just the internal political fights and oppressive regime reinforced by the external intervention by the Western forces that impacted people's livelihoods; the natural disasters diminished their resilience and ability to survive causing them to flee. Hence, the crisis was a genuine manifestation of an extremely complex scenario, which required a global response. Such a response however was slow to come which left the HK Government with having to deal with the problems to the best of its abilities. This resulted in overcrowded and poor conditions in the refugee camps. Alongside less resettlement opportunities becoming available to the VBP and this created much suffering, including for the children, some of whom were born in detention.

## **B. Conditions in the camps in HK**

All three studies – Thomas (2000), Chan (2013) and Law (2014), are critical of the HK Government's treatment of VBP. They criticise the physical conditions of the camps and human rights violations.

In "*Ethnocide: A Cultural Narrative of Refugee Detention in Hong Kong*", Joe Thomas (2000) insists that the treatment of Vietnamese asylum seekers was degrading, demoralising, cruel and inhumane. He makes special reference to the mental and physical impact on individuals, including detaining women and children in high security prisons, especially when it was for more than 5 years. He criticised the

frequent head counts and hut searches, where women, children, the elderly, and sick infants were forced to sit in the open ground for hours. The authorities would use tear-gas on asylum seekers without warning, including on children and women. Deprivation of the freedom of movement and forced repatriations were other issues of significant concern. Thomas (2000) concluded that a combination of indefinite or long-term detention and forced repatriation led to violence and loss of human lives. His conclusion was that “the administrators managed to solve the crisis by perpetuating horrendous human rights violations and the subsequent ‘ethnocide’ of the asylum seekers trapped in the detention centres” (Thomas, 2000, p. 13). He in fact contended that the authorities running refugee detention camps in HK ‘distorted’ the human spirit of the VBP through planned strategies from: total control, through closed camps, limited personal space, media censorship, use of disproportionate force, constant movement of asylum seekers within a camp or from one camp to another, and control of personal communication channels (Thomas, 2000, pp. 220-222). According to him, prolonged detention without a judicial process and inhumane treatment constituted a violation of human rights.

Law’s (2014) research demonstrates that most Vietnamese boat people’s impression of HK consisted of concrete walls and barbed wire fences. She explains how soon after the closed camp policy was introduced in 1982, that barbed wire fence became a ‘salient’ feature of the Vietnamese refugee camps in HK. She also notes how it was simply impossible to have peaceful sleep at night in the camps because it was always noisy and overcrowded. In addition, the lights were on all the time (Law, 2014, pp. 79-80).

Similar sentiments are also reflected by **Yuk Wah Chan**. In his 2013, research “*The Chinese/Vietnamese Diaspora – Revisiting the boat people*”, he too discusses the high



tension among the VBP due to overcrowded detention centres and prolonged confinement. The overcrowding emerged as an overwhelming issue especially during the late 1980s when the VBP population in HK reached over 70,000. Like Law, Chan (2013) sympathises with the VBP in HK living “a life of incarceration behind barbwire”. Anthropologist, Jong Kundsén (2005), describes how:

They live crammed together behind chain-link fences several meters high. The fences, topped with barbed wire are strictly patrolled by the prison authorities or the police. The lights are never switched off. The particular world has no grass, no flowers, no animals, no toys. The prisoners are not allowed to prepare their own food, which is scooped from large plastic barrels on a communal basis... (as cited in Chan, 2013, p. 100)

The responsibility for housing the VBP rested entirely on the shoulders of the HK Government and it attracted a lot of criticism worldwide with reference to human rights violations and inhumane treatment. Although a great deal of this criticism may be justified, the reality was that the VBP crisis was happening within an international environment, which, while in principle well-intended, was, not only, not taking full responsibility for it – its reactions were also very slowly. It was not surprising then that the tensions in the refugees’ camps grew ever stronger resulting ultimately in outbursts of violence, and in riots.

### **C. Violence and riots**

The issue of violence in the camps, especially its causes and effects, is thoroughly examined by the same trio of researchers: Thomas (2000), Chan (2013) and Law (2014). They also described and analysed several of the major riots.

Thomas' (2000) examination of the HK camp riots at the White Head Detention Camp in late 1991, and the Shek Kong Detention Camp in February 1992, are particularly illuminating. According to him, the fight that broke out in White Head between members of the Hong Gai and Minh Dong detainee groups, began with an argument between two people over which TV channel to watch (Thomas, 2000, p. 178-180). The argument continued until they reached their own huts; friends and relatives of the two parties joined in the fight and home-made weapons became involved. The fight lasted five days, despite the use of teargas by police, and 11 meetings with the Correctional Services Department (CSD), UNHCR, and Community and Family Services International (CFSI) trying to negotiate with the two groups. As a result, eight persons were injured; 241 people were arrested and nine were kept in isolation. Also, many detainees experienced fear and anxiety. Around 1,200 members of the Minh Dong group were subsequently moved to the High Island Detention Camp in exchange for 1,400 members from the Hong Gai group. This riot demonstrated the limited awareness of the cultural differences between the Minh Dong and Hong Gai groups by the HK authorities operating the camps. A better understanding of these issues could have potentially avoided the strong confrontation.

It was however, the riot in the Shek Kong Detention Camp that Thomas (2000, p. 183) describes as “one of the most vicious conflicts that ever happened between North and the South Vietnamese asylum seekers in HK”. The incident took place on the eve of Luna New Year 1992. It resulted in 24 detainees being burned to death, 139 injured, 13 missing and 192 detainees facing charges. Sadly, the deceased also included 12 children.

The Shek Kong detention camp riot similarly started with a conflict between two Vietnamese men, a Southerner and a Northerner. In this instance, they quarrelled over an alcohol debt. The fight resulted in minor injuries but escalated as people from their huts decided to take revenge. The Southerners set the hut on fire, with many people were trapped inside. Those who tried to escape, including women and children, were not allowed to leave; the Northerners tried to use women and children to shield them from the attackers outside the hut (Thomas, 2000, pp. 183-186). It was a deeply traumatic incident with many casualties which could have been avoided with a better understanding of the cultural differences between the Vietnamese detainee population.

Chan's (2013) book also contains a chapter on the issue of violence in detention camps and its causes via a contribution by Sophia Suk-mun Law, who describes the escalation of camp riots and violence during 1982. Law (2013) reported three riots between 4 May and 9 May 1982, one of them involved 300 refugees, 25 of whom were injured, another 23 were arrested and charged and almost 1,000 fled to other camps for safety. The 'Closed Camp Policy', introduced in early July 1982, was the main cause of the escalation of the riots and violence. However, that the overcrowding and poor conditions in the camps were contributing factor to many riots among the frustrated VBP.

Policy changes related to the VBP also provoked strong reaction. Especially when they were soon joined by another 2,720 boat people. Law (2013) notes that on 9 July 1988, three hundred women at the Hei Ling Chau detention camp began a hunger strike in protest against the recently introduced compulsory screening policy. According to Law (2013), the Comprehension Plan of Action (CPA) further aggravated the frustrated

VBP who had already spent years in detention camps. This was evidenced by a larger hunger strike involving more than 2,000 detainees, which began at the Whitehead detention camp on 1 June 1989. Another 3,000 VBP joined on the following day (as cited in Chan, 2013, pp. 125-126). However, the hunger strikes failed to achieve a meaningful outcome for the Vietnamese detainees as they were protesting against a highly politicised international environment, which was casting doubts on the 'genuine reasons' for people fleeing Vietnam.

Law (2013) also highlights the differences in reporting styles and content about the riots by the various media. For example, while the Chinese media blamed the riots on the regional and cultural conflicts among the Vietnamese refugees, Western news attributed the underlying causes for the violence on the physical conditions in the camps and the frustration arising from being kept in such a meaningless environment for long periods of time (cited in Chan, 2013, p. 122).

According to Thomas (2000) both kinds of factors played a role, including conflict among factions and poor physical and psychological conditions in the detention camps. He also highlights the unequal level of access to camp resources between groups of detainees and furthermore, the fear of the possibility of forced repatriation. However, the most overwhelming factor was the high level of anxiety and stress experienced by asylum detainees in detention camps, particularly associated with long detention times (Thomas, 2000, pp. 203-204).

Like Thomas, Law (2013) also attributes detention camp violence to the psychological state of the refugees. She notes:

Boat people housed in these camps, both young and old, were confined in a closed space that was barred and wired like prison... Agitation, anxiety, and frustration were easily ignited in these camps, often turning into violence, riots and crimes (as cited in Chan, 2013, p. 122).

Law (2013) blamed the riots on the monotony of the life inside the camps, which was the same on weekends as it was for weekdays (cited by Chan, 2013, p. 125). She explained further that there were neither jobs for adults nor formal schooling for the children: 'Waiting was the only theme of camp life'. The daily routine was repetitious – waiting for meals, baths, and bedtime. Law (2013) also believes that protests and riots were the only means by which these boat people could give vent to their anger and distress.

The slow response from the international community in offering repatriation options caused prolonged waiting periods as well as psychological angst and pain. In some cases, it ignited violent responses. People had to find ways to deal with the uncertainty, felt vulnerable, helpless and exposed to the will of the political powers.

According to Law (cited in Chan, 2013), a change in riot dynamics took place as refugee policies changed. Camp violence and riots became not only more frequent but also a more serious occurrence, and on a larger scale. The first policies to impact were the 'closed-camp policy'<sup>1</sup> of 1982, and the 'screening policy'<sup>2</sup> of 1988. These policies,

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<sup>1</sup> HK Government adopted a closed-camp policy on 2 July 1982. Refugees who arrived and those born after that date were segregated from the local community and no employment outside the closed camps allowed. (Chan, 2013, 122)

<sup>2</sup> On 16 June 1988, HK Government announced a screening policy applied to all new arrivals from Vietnam to determine whether they were genuine refugees. (Ibid, 125)

were followed, in 1989, by the ‘Comprehension Plan of Action (CPA)’<sup>3</sup> and finally the ‘Forced Repatriation Scheme’<sup>4</sup> (FRS).

The FRS provoked even more protests in the camps, and on a much greater scale. Law (cited in Chan, 2013, pp. 126-127) maintained that as the numbers of boat people subjected to mandatory repatriation increased ‘the sense of distress and hopelessness that they shared reached even more extreme levels. To the point, in fact, where decisions about individual cases became a matter of ‘life and death’. For Law, the serious riots that took place in the 1990s were a response to this situation. In one case, 1,200 policemen were called in to quell the riot, and hundreds of rounds of teargas were used, which adversely affected the health of boat people of all ages.

A further complication emerged with tensions between Chinese-Vietnamese and ethnic Vietnamese. Chan (2013), claims that the escalation of these tensions in addition to the frictions between North Vietnamese and South Vietnamese at these detention centres, often turned into violence and riots. He explains that to minimise this, the HK Government introduced a segregation policy and henceforth the ethnic Chinese-Vietnamese and the Vietnamese were segregated into different camps (Chan, 2013, p. 77). According to the statistics provided by Chan (2013, p. 111), from 1979 to 1991, the number of VBP who arrived in HK included 24,581 Chinese-Vietnamese from South Vietnam, 38,836 Chinese-Vietnamese from North Vietnam, 43,755 Vietnamese from South Vietnam, and 56,646 Vietnamese from North Vietnam. The large numbers

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<sup>3</sup> At the second Indochinese Refugees conference held in Geneva in June 1989, the CPA was formulated which acknowledged the legitimacy of the screening process and the mandatory repatriation of those who did not have refugee status. (Ibid, 126)

<sup>4</sup> In December 1989, HK implemented a forced repatriation scheme. (Ibid)

of arrivals impacted the ability of the HK Government to provide decent living conditions in the detention camps but also required concerted resettlement efforts.

#### **D. Resettlement**

Resettlement is a significant part of the refugee story in HK. Some Vietnamese refugees waited as long as seven years to leave HK to resettle in another country, and as many as 67,000 VBP did not receive a resettlement opportunity.

Resettlement of the Vietnamese refugees remained a critical problem for the British HK Government throughout the 25 years hosting the VBP. During the peak of the influx, the average number of resettlement places given to the refugees in HK was less than 12 per cent while HK received 35 per cent of all Vietnamese refugees. The worst period was during May and June 1979, when only 4 per cent of the total VBP in HK were given resettlement opportunities (Cartmail, 1983, pp. 194-195).

According to Law (2014), at the end of the 1970s, while the number of annual arrivals increased to an alarming level, the Vietnamese resettlement process in many Western countries was slowing down due to funding cuts by the United Nations. Consequently, she asserts “instead of receiving more international aid to help resolves its growing refugee problem, HK faced an ever-increasing chaotic problem” (Law, 2014, p. xiv).

The large number of Vietnamese leaving the country soon became an international crisis, which prompted the United Nations to hold a conference in Geneva in July 1979 to seek resolutions. As a result, many Western countries offered resettlements to VBP, the major ones being Australia, Canada, and the USA. According the UNHCR’s

statistics, the numbers of VBP resettled in these three countries were 108,808; 100,012 and 402,382 respectively.

Chan's (2013) historical perspective on the group dynamics among the ethnic Chinese-Vietnamese and ethnic Vietnamese boat people in HK makes an important contribution to our understanding of the different models of settlement that emerged for the VBP in Asia, including the transition for many single refugees from migration to marriage migration.

Without a chance to resettle in a third country or the reluctance to wait any longer, some Vietnamese women chose an uncertain future by marrying local men of whom they had very little knowledge, in some cases, none at all (Chan, 2013). After the marriage, the women would leave the camp and follow their husbands (Chan, 2013, pp. 65-66). As a result of the intermarriages between HK men and Vietnamese women, there was a higher number of females of Vietnamese origin in HK than males. According to the HKSAR Government Census of 2006, among the nearly 3,000 Vietnamese in HK, around a quarter were men and three quarters women.

Chan (2013, p. 3) also contends that previous research on the Vietnamese crisis was 'missing an Asian part of the refugee story'. The lack of the voices of the 'returnees' – those who were sent back to Vietnam, is another critical omission. He emphasises that most studies are about overseas Vietnamese refugees who had resettled in the West. In contrast, little is known about the 67,000 VBP who had failed the screening that would have pronounced them refugees and consequently had been repatriated to Vietnam.



Chan's (2013, p. 161) research further explains the difficulties of many of the repatriated VBP, such as finding it hard to adapt to life in Vietnam after being returned there and how they longed for a chance to re-migrate to the place where they had sought asylum. According to him, after repatriation to Vietnam, some of the 'returnees' felt discriminated against because they had tried to flee the country. Upon return, they had difficulties in obtaining household registration from the local authorities. This aggravated situation resulted in additional challenges for those who had fled Vietnam pushed away because of political and environmental factors.

### **E. Implications for children**

An additional focus of Law's (2014) research was the well-being of refugee children, in particular the devastating psychological effects that they suffered from being kept in detention for many years. She also raised concerns about the 'long-term, deleterious effects on the refugee children's social and intellectual maturation' from the lack of exposure to anything outside the detention environment (Law, 2014, p. 94) (see photo 2.1). Furthermore, she relates the interruption in children's development, to the minimal educational services provided in refugee camps and to the fact that the frequent transfers of detainees to different detention centres often disrupted any education that was provided. Law also notes that there were instances where children elected not to attend school because they were afraid that their parents might be repatriated while they were at school. Even more distressing, camp children were inevitably exposed to physical and sexual violence inside the camps on a daily basis; many themselves being victims (Law, 2014, p. 93).



**Photo 2.1. Children in detention camp.**  
**Source: HK Government Information Services (GIS)**

These children also faced difficulties re-adjusting to a different environment than the one in HK. For example, 35 per cent of the 45,000 VBP in HK were children, many of whom had developed some sense of attachment to this place. These children had spent their childhood in the refugee camps, where they had picked up the Cantonese language through interactions with social workers and camp officers. Most of them had reached adolescence by the time they were repatriated or resettled. Chan (2013) notes that many of this group returned to HK when they were adults, through ‘introduction marriage’<sup>5</sup>, which has been a common practice among the former VBP. In summary, the works of Thomas (2000), Chan (2013) and Law (2014) gave an overall picture of the history of VBP in HK. Each included particular themes and facts that together highlighted the significance of the whole situation. Thomas (2000)

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<sup>5</sup> Many former VBP returned to HK to get married via ‘introduction marriage’. They met their potential partners by using match making services and paid between \$40,000 and \$50,000 HK dollars; or being introduced by Vietnamese middle-persons, who settled in HK, for a ‘introduction’ fee; or being introduced by their relatives or acquaintances who live in HK (Chan, 2013, pp. 163-164).

focused on the socio-cultural dynamics of the Vietnamese asylums in detention camps, the HK Government's poor treatments of VBP and the on-going riots in various detention camps. Chan (2013) emphasized the differences among North Vietnamese, South Vietnamese, and Chinese-Vietnamese, and how these differences often lead to conflicts. He also paid attention to a particular group of VBP, who were repatriated and later found their way back to HK. Law (2014) drew specific attention to the psychological effects that detention camps had on incarcerated children. However, she also noted the heavy financial burden on the HK Government of having to provide for the VBP pending their resettlement or repatriation, over and above the support from the UNHCR.

The issues raised by Thomas (2000), Chan (2013) and Law (2014) are important and significant to forging a comprehensive history of VBP in HK. However, their works, individually, and collectively did not present the whole story. As the voices of how the VBP experienced this period in their lives and those of the people involved in the crisis – are missing. The original contribution of this study to the subject of VBP crisis in HK, therefore, is to reconstruct a comprehensive account of the events that took place in HK between 1975 and 2000, when more than 213,000 VBP came to seek refuge by an inclusion of these missing voices. I believe that it is only possible to fully comprehend the complexity and also appreciate the enormity of the VBP dilemma in HK, by incorporating all aspects of the crisis including the various experiences of the people involved in the same in-depth research analysis.

Based on and synergistically complementing the creative component of this research, the exegesis sets out to achieve this aim by the addition of new voices to an

amalgamation of all the themes covered in the research by Thomas (2000), Chan (2013), Law (2014) and other researchers. The addition of these new voices is unique because they not only illuminate on important facts not previously heard but also give consideration to both sides of this highly charged state of affairs: those of refugees and of government officials. An amalgamation of all the old and new facts encourages the production of a much-needed new perspective on this very distressing history that has the capacity to inform current refugee policy.

In recent times, Australia's major political parties have both tried to address the boat people issue by way of deterrence-based policies. Public opinion in Australia was divided over the Government's stance and the international community heavily criticised Australia for its treatment of asylum seekers. In early 2018, there were rallies across the nation, Australians demanded to end to Manus Island and Nauru refugee centres (<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/03/australians-demand-manus-island-nauru-refugee-centres-180325101723423.html>). According to the International Amnesty and Human Right Watch, the conditions of Nauru refugee centre was 'appalling'. They also found those who transferred to Nauru initially spent a year or more in cramped vinyl tents while temperatures inside regularly reached 45-50°C. Detainees had to stand in long lines for toilet facilities, which were also inadequate. Asylum seekers described conditions as "prison-like" with regular searches of tents and showers restricted to two-minutes (<https://www.news.com.au/lifestyle/real-life/news-life/nauru-asylum-seeker-conditions-abuse-sexual-harassment-filthy-tents/news-story/58a82f1cf914689fcac1284c781e2831>).

This was less the case during the Australia's mass migration era (1940s-1960s). Displaced persons refugees and migrants, who came to Australia then, were recruited

and underwent health and security checks in Europe.<sup>6</sup> In 1976, when the first boat arrived in Australia carrying refugees who had by-passed formal immigration procedures, they were accepted as immigrants on humanitarian grounds. Within three years a further 53 refugee boats had arrived. Those already in Australia were offered permanent residence, and refugees began to be admitted through resettlement camps based in South East Asia. The camps filled as Vietnam expelled ethnic Chinese, and others fled terrible suffering and privation.<sup>7</sup>

## 2.3 Methodology

As indicated earlier, the outcome of my PhD research project is a creative production thesis, which consists of two components – a website and an exegesis. In its essence, it is an oral history study to which both components make their own contribution and insights on the VBP saga. After clarifying the definition and the approach taken in theory development, below I further explain the methodology in terms of design and strategies applied to achieve the desired goals for both components. In this section, I also discuss the administration and logistics of the oral history project, which include my theoretical perspective, the structure of the conducted interviews and the process of identifying, locating, and recruiting of interviewees.

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<sup>6</sup> Peters, N, *Milk and Honey But No Gold*, University of Western Australia (WA) Press, 2001, pp. 7-79.

<sup>7</sup> <https://museums victoria.com.au/origins/history.aspx?pid=97>. Viviani, N. 1980. 'Australian Government Policy on the Entry of Vietnamese Refugees in 1975'. Report. Centre for the Study of Asian-Australian Relations. CSAAR Research Paper No. 1; see also Viviani, N. 1982a. *The Long Journey: Vietnamese Migration and Settlement in Australia*. Melbourne: University Press.

## A. Background

“Humans are not ideally set up to understand logic; they are ideally set up to understand stories.” (Roger C. Schank, Cognitive Scientist).

This study was driven by the limitations of the research carried out to-date on the history of VBP in HK. I maintain that the development of a comprehensive perspective on the VBP dilemma in HK necessitates the input of more diverse voices, and that this is best achieved via a storytelling narrative.

It has been more than four decades since the telling of this history first began; I contend that it is crucial to record the human narratives of this period now, while many of the witnesses are still alive and able to recall the past. The main aim for this research is to conduct a thorough study of this chapter of HK history by fact finding, information gathering from existing literature and the addition of in-depth interviews with people who were witness to this period in HK history and had never before had the opportunity to contribute their experience.

In this study, I adopted a *qualitative inquiry* approach. It is an approach that researchers often use to explore and understand the meaning of a social problem. As John W. Creswell (2014) suggests, this form of inquiry helps researchers to explain ‘the complexity of a situation’ (p. 4). One of the characteristics of qualitative research and the reason I utilise it, is its use of multiple sources of data gathering: interviews, observations and documents.

In *Research Design*, Creswell (2014, p. 187) recommends five types of qualitative inquiry utilised by social science researchers today for exploring processes, activities,

and events: narrative, phenomenology, ethnography, case study, and grounded theory. This research is based on grounded theory which Creswell (2014) describes as ‘a design of inquiry from sociology in which the researcher derives a general, abstract theory of a process, action, or interaction grounded in the views of participants’ (p. 14).

The research methodology for this study combines community history and oral history. My analysis invokes the grounded theory method, a form of inquiry that enables me to develop theory that is grounded in the experiences and perspectives of the study participants. Its intention is for participants’ narratives to remain central to the study as it unfolds. The participants in this instance are former VBP in HK and the people who dealt with them: government officials, non-profit and non-government organisations (NGOs) and policy makers. I build an understanding of participants’ experiences by utilising active listening skills, which, according to Alison Doyle (2017) is a process that involves taking steps to draw out information that might not otherwise be shared by participants. (<https://www.thebalance.com/active-listening-skills-with-examples-2059684>).

## **B. Definition**

Various labels have been used to define the Vietnamese who arrived in HK to seek refuge. This to a large extent was the result from the fact that at different periods, significant changes to the situation of the Vietnamese refugees in HK prompted the Government to modify its immigration policy. Usually, each time a policy change was made, a different label was given to the Vietnamese people. For example, from 1975 to 1988, it was ‘Vietnamese refugees’. After a screening policy was put in place in

June 1988, the term ‘Vietnamese boat people’ was introduced. In 1991, the new Vietnamese arrivals began to be called ‘illegal immigrant’. From 1992 onward, all Vietnamese arrivals were called ‘Vietnamese migrants’. The term ‘ex-China Vietnamese’ was also used to describe the Vietnamese who had settled in the Mainland prior to their arrival in Hong Kong. In this exegesis, I use the term ‘Vietnamese boat people’ (VBP) to describe all Vietnamese who arrived in HK and South East Asian countries to seek asylum. They all used boats to escape from Vietnam, which is the reason for the choice of this unifying description. Consequently, this research is not limited to just the Vietnamese people who arrived in HK from Vietnam by seas. During the VBP era, there were Vietnamese people who had already settled in China and subsequently entered HK by boat.

### **C. Grounded theory**

Grounded theory was developed in the 1960s by two sociologists, Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss (1967) and later advanced by Strauss and Corbin (1990). Glaser and Strauss argued that researchers needed a method that would allow them to move from data to theory, so that new theories could emerge. They called ‘their new perspective’ grounded theory and its preferred methodological tools: participant observation, focus groups and in-depth interviews (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p. 1).

Since Glaser and Strauss published this new perspective in *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (1967), it has been widely assessed/adapted and utilised by a number of social researchers in various studies. For example, Phyllis Stern (1980, p. 20) promoted as



“the strongest case for the use of grounded theory - investigations of relatively uncharted waters, or to gain a fresh perspective on a familiar situation”.

In *Basis of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques*, Straus and Corbin (1998) note that from a grounded theory perspective:

“A researcher does not begin a project with a preconceived theory in mind (unless his or her purpose is to elaborate and extend existing theory). Rather the researcher begins with an area of study and allows the theory to emerge from the data” (p. 12).

Glaser and Strauss (1967) also record the multiple data sources that grounded theory often draws on to analyse: in-depth interviews, participant observation, archival documentation and secondary sources of published materials (see also Charmaz, 2006 and Creswell, 2014). Applying this analysis, ensures that the theory evolves and develops throughout the research process itself. It is, therefore, a product of the interplay between data collection and data analysis.

Although there is a large body of information from the research focused on the history of VBP in HK, my research is distinctive, because it explores all aspects of this history, whereas case studies undertaken to date, focus on particular issues in a particular period. An essential part of the use of grounded theory by this PhD project is the analysis of participant narratives in combination with data drawn from a variety of existing texts and documentary sources: official records, newspapers, books, theses, reports; private documents: journals, diaries, letters and photos. My study, because of its broader perspective, contributes a different standpoint on the VBP crisis in HK to that of existing bodies of knowledge.

## **D. Oral history**

The oral Historian, Donald Ritchie (2003) explains ‘oral history collects memories and personal commentaries of historical significance through recorded interviews’ (p. 19). According to Charlton, Myers and Sharpless (2007), the practice of oral history goes back many centuries. As early as the fifth century BCE, the Greek historian Herodotus used first-person interviews to gather information for his account of the Persian Wars (Charlton et al., 2007, p. 9). The concept of modern oral history only developed in the Western academic world, around the 1940s, starting with work by Columbia University historian Allan Nevins (Charlton et al., 2007, p. 11). The invention of portable cassette recorders by the Philips Company in 1963, took the oral history interview to a new electronic phase. Now, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with digital technologies and the current fast-growing pace of the World Wide Web, the oral history methodology continues to grow. These technologies have enabled researchers to be ever more creative with their data collecting and analysing techniques (Charlton et al., 2007, pp. 9-28).

In *The Voice of the Past – Oral History*, the oral historian Paul Thompson (2000, p. 10) alleges that oral history is particularly suitable for projects that focus on learning the historical background of an issue that has significance for the current environment. One of the goals for this research is to identify lessons from the history of VBP in HK that can be useful in dealing with current boat people seeking asylum in Australia, Europe or anywhere else in the world.

Oral history is also a particularly appropriate methodology for this type of research focus as it also reveals the emotion of the individuals who lived through the experiences. The oral historians, Donald Richie (2011) and Paul Thompson (2000) insisted that not only the facts about the events, but also the personal experiences of individuals who lived through the events should be included in a history. Thompson (2000, p. 21) notes that the use of a human voice ‘breathes life into history’. For as Ritchie (2003, p. 48) states: “above all, oral history projects, by recording history in the words of those who lived it, can tell future researchers how people lived and how they perceived the events of their time”.

Thompson (2000) and Richie (2003) also noted that oral history projects sometimes benefit the researcher as well as the study participants. Thompson (2000, p. 184) claimed that a significant development of oral history has been ‘reminiscence therapy’. He considered the writing of history from oral history as a form of ‘giving back’ to the people who made and experienced history. Thompson claimed that when the researcher presents the stories told by participants, it gives them confidence in their own memories and interpretation of the past, through their own words (p. 3, 20).

I chose to launch an oral history project to gather stories, experiences, thoughts, and perspectives from a cross-section of people associated with the VBP crisis in HK. The semi-structured - oral interview schedule for this study is designed to uncover the *what*, *where and when* of the events that took place as well as the *why* and *how*. Then transform the recorded data into text and a visual website to preserve it for future generations.

Charlton et al. (2007, p. 100) and Thompson (2000, pp. 6-7) suggest that researchers should pay attention to the importance of the potential for collaborative work between the researcher and the community. They claim that community members could offer new materials, such as documents, newspapers, paintings, films and photographs which would not have otherwise been traced, or suggest potential interviewees and topics to researchers. In some cases, it can result in important new areas of inquiry. According to the historian Alon Confino, these materials are potentially a form of collective memory. He defined collective memory as ‘the representation of the past and the making of it into shared cultural knowledge by successive generations in “vehicles of memory”, such as books, films, museums, commemorations, and others’. (Confino, 1997, p. 1386). A website as a depository of such materials can act as a new form of collective memory which allows unrestricted access and tracing of events which otherwise would have been very difficult and even impossible.

There are several types of oral history and my research falls under the ‘community history’ category. Ritchie (2003, p. 223) defines ‘community’ as “a group of people who share a common identity, whether based on location, racial or ethnic group, religion, organizational affiliation or occupation”. The community under my investigation is the group of people who were a part of the history of VBP in HK from 1975 to 2000. Ritchie (2003) also reminds oral historians that their job is to explore and document the ‘diversity and complexity’ of the history, not to celebrate it. He stated: “Community naturally seek to preserve and present their best image. Interviewers often find themselves being steered toward those who tell “success” stories’ they must attempt to record the dissatisfied as well” (p. 226).

Ritchie (2003, p. 49) claims that age, health, level of energy and ability to recall are the determining factors of how long the interview will be. He, however, advised that it is best to keep the interview under two hours to avoid exhausting both, the interviewee and interviewer. Most of my interviews were ranging from one to one and a half hours. The shortest interview was thirty minutes and the longest was two sets of sixty minutes each with the same interviewee.

For the oral interview part of my research, I recruited 33 people. They are categorized into three sub-groups A, B and C. Group A consists of people who worked in the refugee camps, volunteer agents, English teachers, social services staff, legal staff, officers of the UNHCR, contractors and HK Citizens; Group B – the former VBP who took refuge in HK, and Group C include policy makers, British HK Government officials and staff. The interviews with participants from group B, focused on their experiences as refugees in HK; the focus for Group A and C are on their experiences of handling or assisting the VBP.

The term ‘gatekeeper’ is commonly used by Ritchie (2003) and other oral historians when describing someone who may have been a long-time employee who still communicates with former colleagues, or close friend of significance in the events. Such people often can help identify, locate other potential interviewees and help persuade them to be interviewed (p. 88). The ‘gatekeepers’ who introduced most of the candidates for group A and C to me were Mr Peter Lai, a former Chief of the Security Branch<sup>8</sup> in HK from 1995 to 1997. His involvement with the VBP crisis

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<sup>8</sup> The Security Branch was part of the HK Government. It was a Policy Branch and also the Coordination Body for the VBP.

commenced at the height of the influx in 1979; Mr Eddy Chan, a former British HK Government employee; Dr. Joyce Ho, a former officer of the Correctional Services Department (CSD) that was responsible for the security of VBP in the detention camps; and for group B, it was Mrs Vu, my first interviewee who was a former VBP. After the interview, Mrs Vu helped me to recruit other former VBP.

Among the interviewees (see Table 2.1), eight were from group B - the former VBP who took refuge in HK, nine were from group A - the people who assisted the VBP on a volunteer basis, and 15 from group C – Government officials and staff. Most of the interviews were conducted in HK, some in Australia - Canberra and Brisbane, and one took place in Amersfoort, the Netherlands. The interviews were conducted at various locations including the business lounge of the hotel where I stayed in HK, the faculty lounges at various universities in HK and Australia, meeting rooms and offices where interviewees worked, and on some occasions at the residences of the interviewees. With the exception of one participant whose immediate family still lives in Vietnam, all interviewees agreed for their names and photos to be used.

The number of the interviews to be conducted was determined by achieving saturation in the issues raised by the participants, that is there was a great degree of repetition without new insights. Given the 25-year long time period that this research covers and the fact that it concluded 18 years ago, the aim was not to search for some kind of statistical representation of the VBP and the people who dealt with them but to exhaust the aspects raised by the interviewees. Such a saturation was achieved with 9, 8 and 15 interviews respectively from group A, B and C. Conducting further interviews was not required from an academic point of view as there were large similarity and overlap

between the issues brought forward by different people. The people who dealt with the VBP generally recognize that this crisis was a significant part of HK's history that needs to be preserved for future generations and wanted to share their knowledge to inform people with similar experiences. All former VBP interviewed were similarly interested to share their stories with some feeling a sense of relief because they were able to speak up. All Group B members-were enthusiastic to introduce friends who shared similar experiences.

**Table 2.1. List of Interviewees**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Period</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Location/ Department</b>	<b>Interviewee Group</b>
Adrielle Panares	54	F	1991 - 1999	Officer of the ISS	Various refugee & detention camps	A
Alan Yee	61	M	1975 - 2000	HK Citizen	None	A
Alistair Asprey	74	M	1990 - 1995	Chief of Security Branch	HK Gov. Security Branch	C
Bailey Chan	77	M	1979 - 1984	Gov. Servant	Reception centre & Gov. Dockyard	C
Bonnie Wong	68	F	1978 - 1998	Prison Officer	Correctional Services Department	C
Carrie Yau		F	1987 - 1988	Principal Assistant Secretary	Security Branch	C
Cheung-Ang Siew Mei	58	F	1983 - 1997	Program Director	Christian Action	A
Dai Le	50	F	1977 - 1979	Boat person	Sham Shui Po camp	B
Diem Nguyen	61	F	1982 - 1983	Boat person	Jubilee camp	B
Duc Truong	60	M	1982 - 1984	Boat person	Chi Ma Wan camp	B
Eddy Chan	68	M	1991 - 1994	Principal Assistant Secretary	Security Branch	C
Francis Tse	59	M	1988 - 1998	Welfare Officer	Whitehead Detention camp	C
Gordon Leung	56	M	1994 - 1996	Principal Assistant Secretary	Security Branch	C
Henry Siu	70	M	1975 - 1996	Immigration Officer	Immigration Department	C
Huong Thanh Vu	45	F	1987 - 1995	Boat person	Camps: Sham Shui Po, & Pillar Point	B
Huynh Quoc Do	91	M	1979 - 1995	Boat person	Camps: Kai Tak North, YMCA & Jubilee	B
James Ginns	50	M	1987, 1994 - 1999	English teacher,	Chi Ma Wan, Pillar Point camp	A



				Camp Manager		
John Fortune	89	M	1975 - 1989	Director	Civil Aid Service	A
Joyce Chang	77	F	1975 - 2000	Professional Assistant	Caritas Hong Kong	A
Kathleen Malone	75	F	1979, 1980 - 1982	Volunteered English teacher	Sham Shui Po camp	A
Lam Yu Lai	56	M	1992 - 1998	Principal Officer	Prison Department	C
Dr Lee Shiu Hung	80	M	1975 - 1994	Assistant Director	Medical & Health Department	C
Lien Tran	51	F	1988 - 1995, 1995 - 1996	Boat person	Kai Tak Detention camp	B
Lionel Lam	73	M	1978 - 1979	Head of Homicide Bureau	Police Department	C
Mak Pak Lam	54	F	1977 - 1980	Camp Commander	Prison Department	C
M Huynh	60	M	1978 - 1979	Boat person	Military base camp	B
Paul Lok	74	M	1975 - 1978, 1979 -	Training Officer	Immigration Department	C
Paul Wong	37	M	1989 - 1996	Boat person	Camps: Tai A Chau, Hai Ling Chau, Whitehead, Green Island, Pillar Point	B
Penelope Mathev	53	F	1992	Law student	Jesuit Refugee Service	A
Peter Choy	73	M	1986 - 2000	Assistant Director	Immigration Department	C
Peter Lai	67	M	1979, 1995 - 1998	Chief	Security Branch	C
Stephen Yau		M	1975 - 1998	Chief Executive	HK Christian Service	A

**Note:** A = Vietnamese boat person; B = person dealing with Vietnamese boat people; C = Government officials and staff.

As stated earlier, the exegesis and the website form two outcomes of my PhD research program that address the same central research question and contribute to the knowledge of the history of VBP in HK, however, in different formats. In the exegesis, research findings are presented as text, tables and graphical charts of statistics. On the website with the domain name: <http://www.vietnameseboatpeople.hk/>, research findings are presented visually and with sounds. The website allows me to creatively exhibit materials related to the history of VBP in HK in ways that the exegesis could not, i.e. films and audio interviews. The website includes the voices of the interviewees that reflect their feelings and emotion as they recalled their memories. For example, the magnitude of the historical riot took place on 20 May 1995 in the Whitehead Detention Centre was powerfully depicted in the documentary film, where one can hear the sound of chaos and sense the seriousness of the situation through the scene of thousands of armed police officers pushed themselves against the furious detainees. The website also displays multiple images of artworks created by Vietnamese while they were in detention centres, maps and pictures of the Vietnamese refugee camps and detention centres in HK, and hundreds of images of VBP in HK throughout the 25-year crisis.

The website hosts the collective memory of the VBP in HK. It is interactive and a living resource, which provides a platform for others to deposit their stories enabling the content to grow. This creative side of the PhD will become publicly available and will be hosted by UNHCR allowing the stories from VBP to be heard and seen from all around the world. Although it was produced as part of the PhD studies, it does not require direct connection to the exegesis and will take a life of its own upon completion of the thesis. Normally, the exegesis does not provide a direct commentary on the

creative piece, nor does the creative piece simply illustrate the exegesis – rather both elements maintain the integrity of the specific discourse in which they are created (Curtin University Guidelines for Creative Production Theses. <https://research.curtin.edu.au/postgraduate/current-students/thesis-preparation/>).

In the next chapter, a comprehensive account of the VBP crisis in HK from 1975 to 2000 is presented in chronological order. This includes statistical data and policy overview. The value of this research is mainly historical, but it also makes a clear argument that serious crises situations which result in large and prolonged population movements, such as the VBP in HK, the responsibility for solutions rests with the global community, namely, ICEM, IOM, UNHCR and resettlement countries, and is not imposed on one particular government. As the roots of the problems triggering population movements are often the result from interconnected world politics and global problems (such as, for example, climate change and sea level rise), the solutions should also be international and globalised. The HK Government's reaction to the VBP crisis was not to send anybody away but also to be flexible and adjust its reaction depending on the changing circumstances. This story generates academic insights but also represents a stepping block for political views and activist actions which respect the dignity of the affected people and state clear responsibility.



## **Chapter 3 : A Comprehensive account of the Vietnamese boat people Crisis in Hong Kong from 1975 to 2000**

This chapter reveals the history of Vietnamese boat people (VBP) crisis in Hong Kong (HK) from the time the crisis began until it ended. The order in which the events occurred sheds light on their cause and effect and provides insight into how and why they happened the way they did. The chapter also focuses on how the British HK Government responded to the ever-changing crisis, what happened when the Vietnamese immigrant policies were modified or new ones were introduced, how the VBP responded to these changes, and how the people of HK reacted to the whole situation of VBP over the course of the next twenty-five years.

The information used to compile this historical overview of the 25-yearlong crisis is based on existing written sources of information. They include:

- newspaper articles from the period of the crisis;
- academic studies on Vietnamese refugees in HK;
- government documents, such as the 2012 summary of the events compiled by the former Principal Assistant Secretary for the Security Branch of HK and the yearly reports produced by the British HK Government Information Services from 1976 to 2001 (the titles of these reports vary; they are properly cited and all contain some information about VBP).

During the VBP era, there was a major change in the Government and political situation in the HK territory. On 1 July 1997, the United Kingdom transferred sovereignty over HK to China, referred to as ‘the Handover’. This milestone marked

the end of the British administration in HK and the beginning of the HK Special Administrative Region (HKSAR). The HKSAR Government replaced the then British HK Government. Below is the background information and a summary of the events related to the VBP crisis in HK.

### **3.1 Background Information**

The first group of VBP arrived in HK on 04 May 1975 and the last detention camp for VBP, Pillar Point, was closed on 31 May 2000. This marked the end of the 25-year Vietnamese crisis in HK.

When the first group of VBP arrived, HK was already one of the most densely populated places in the world. Based on the Government's Report of the Year (1980, p. 2), with a total land area of only 1,059 square kilometres and a population of more than 5.5 million, the overall density was 4,487 people per square kilometre, compared with 33 in Malaysia and 22 in the United States. In the metropolitan areas of HK Island, Kowloon and Tsuen Wan, where most of the population lived, the ratio was 25,400 people per square kilometre.

The mainland area of HK is steep and most of the territory's 236 islands are unproductive hillside or small barren islands. The territory does not have natural resources; much of its food requirements have to be imported together with 25 per cent of its essential water supplies and all the raw materials needed for its industry (The Facts, 1979).

When the crisis started, the tragic stories of Vietnamese people risking their lives and enduring long, arduous and hazardous journeys to escape from the rule of communist regime, political persecution and a war-torn country had triggered the HK community to take humanitarian actions to provide a helping hand. Many people in HK, themselves at one time refugees or immigrants, were sympathetic toward the VBP. They were generous, compassionate, and helpful. However, at that time, no one had foreseen that the situation would last nearly two and a half decades, with almost one quarter of a million Vietnamese becoming refugees from their land. Consequently, as time passed and the VBP kept on coming, ‘compassion fatigue’ happened. Lillian Lee from the South China Morning Post (SCMP) wrote:

More than 10 years ago, when the Vietnamese refugees first appeared in this tiny piece of land, they were welcomed with open arms, with lots of donations and assistance from HK people and the Government. The Government and a majority of HK, not only expressed sympathy, but showed it materially, offering a great deal of help. But now, it is a different story (Lee, 18 April 1990).

Dr Chang described the Vietnam Saga in HK as: “The never-ending Vietnamese boat people arrivals, the riots and disturbances in the camps, and legal challenges lodged by the VBP regarding the screening procedure and illegal detention” (Dr Joyce S.H. Chang, Brenda Ku, Lum Bik, and Betty Ann Maheu, 2003, p. 12).

## **3.2 The 25 years – a Chronology**

The VBP crisis plagued HK for 25 years – from May 1975 to June 2000. More than four decades ago HK, one of the most densely populated places in the world, was known as one of the safest havens in the world for Vietnamese refugees. From the beginning to the end of the VBP crisis, HK did not turn a single boat person away. A complete chronology of the events on a year by year basis is presented in Appendix 1. In addition to statistical data on new arrivals, resettled people and costs, Appendix 1 also provides a description of the arrivals and accommodation arrangements as well as a thorough overview of the changing policy environment and attitudes towards the VBP. Appendix 2 gives a synthesis of the historical timeline outlining the main events.

To the HK authorities, it was two and a half decades of struggles with the never-ending arrivals of VBP, plus a large contingent of Ex-China Vietnamese Illegal Immigrants (ECVII), who went to China during 1978/79 and had already been accepted by this country as refugees. It was a constant struggle in searching for accommodation and resettlement opportunities for over 200,000 VBP as well as addressing the challenges in keeping the VBP safe against natural disasters such as typhoons and monsoon; international scrutiny of its detention centres and its forced repatriation scheme; numerous legal battles regarding its refugee screening procedure; on-going riots and disturbances in refugee camps; criticism from the public; and pressure from China to solve the situation before hand-over. The repatriation programs were complex and came at a significant cost: \$7.8 billion was carried by the HK British Government and HK\$1 billion by the a UNHCR (Carvalho, 2015). Notwithstanding the mounting costs, international pressure and many other complexities, the HK British government never



turned away a single boat person. Below is a concise historical description of the 25-year period.

It all began on 4 May 1975, when the Danish container ship, *Clara Maersk* arrived in the harbour with 3,743 Vietnamese refugees whom they had rescued from drowning in the South China Sea (see photo 3.1). These refugees were swiftly accommodated and processed for resettlement. In fact, within a year, they had all left HK to for other countries.



**Photo 3.1. The *Clara Maersk*. Source: HK Government Information Services (GIS)**

After this first group of refugees, Vietnamese people continued to arrive in HK in small boats. The numbers of arrivals were relatively small, about 1,200 between 1976 and 1977. In 1978, this rapidly grew to 6,000. However, this increase was not as disturbing to the Government as was the arrival in the Harbour on 23 December, of the *Huey Fong* (see photo 3.2), a Panamanian-registered freighter, carrying a cargo of 3,318

refugees on board. It was to be HK's first - but by far not the only one - experience of this kind.



**Photo 3.2. The *Huey Fong*. Source: HK GIS**

In 1979 the VBP situation in the region became critical. In June, the total number of VBP in refugee camps in Southeast Asia and HK was over 350,000. The host countries of Southeast Asia declared that they had reached their limit. The Thai Government stopped accepting refugees. Malaysia turned refugees away. Meanwhile, HK, which had declared itself the 'port of first asylum', soon became the leading destination for VBP. Vietnamese seeking refugee status deemed HK as the transit point for resettling in another country.

For HK, 1979 marked the highest point of VBP arrivals. The influx of refugees in the territory had gone from a trickle to a flood of more than 68,700. Fifteen refugee camps were quickly set up to house the VBP at former military camps, schools, factory

buildings plus a few more temporary facilities at the Government Dockyard and Western Quarantine Anchorage (see photos 3.3 and 3.4).



**Photo 3.3. VBP Open Centre. Source: HK GIS**



**Photo 3.4. The Government Dockyard mid-1979. Source: HK GIS**

The growing number of the VBP also heightened the conflicts between Vietnamese and locals as the local workers felt a threat from the cheap labour of the boat people. The people of HK complained about the strict rules applied toward their relatives and friends from China. They resented the fact that the Government provided support to strangers from Vietnam while the Mainland people who crossed the border to HK were detained and repatriated to China (Law, 2014, pg. 33-37). Furthermore, the people of HK were also unhappy about the use of financial, human and other resources on VBP instead on Public Work Programs.

The immense number of VBP arrivals was not the Government's only concern; the significant drop in support for refugee resettlement from other countries presented a tremendous worry. At the 1979, Geneva Conference on Indo-Chinese Refugees, the Governor of HK drew attention to the fact that while HK received 35 per cent of all Vietnamese refugees, the number of resettlement places given to the refugees in HK was less than 12 percent. The crisis became acute during May and June 1979, when the VBP inflow was 38,339 against an outflow of only 2,108, a mere 4 per cent of the total (Cartmail, 1983, pp. 194-195).

While the resettlement VBP remained a critical problem for the British HK Government, VBP continued to flood HK. The majority were from North Vietnam and it would be difficult for them to prove that their escape was due to racial or political persecution as was the case for those from the South. Hence, it appeared to the British HK Government that the North Vietnamese who came to HK did so for economic reasons. Lau Kong-wah, an independent legislator said: "it is crystal clear that most of the Vietnamese who come to HK are economic refugees, so there is no reason for us

to take up this burden again” (Manthorpe, *The Vancouver Sun*, 22 Aug 1997). As such, it was difficult for this group of VBP to garner support for their resettlement overseas.

The struggle to resettle about 20,000 VBP, in July 1982, had the British HK Government introduce the first deterrence measure, the so-called ‘closed camp’ policy. From then on, all VBP who arrived in HK were placed in closed centres on remote outlying islands. They were not allowed to seek employment and their movements in and out of camps were restricted. Some criticized the British HK Government for keeping freedom-seeking people behind barbed wire. The rationale behind this new policy was a combination of the general slowing down of the resettlement program, the belief that harsher conditions in closed camps and the prohibition on work would deter more Vietnamese from wanting to make HK their destination.

The first deterrence measure yielded a few years of reduction in arrival numbers. Then suddenly, without any warning in 1988, the number of VBP arrivals soared to more than 18,000, five times higher than the number in previous years. The rate of arrivals that year far exceeded the rate of resettlement support from other lands, resulting in a large number of refugees stranded in HK, mostly without any hope of overseas resettlement. This sudden upsurge prompted the British HK Government to introduce a second ‘human deterrence’ measure in June that year – a ‘screening policy’ for all VBP, designed to specifically differentiate between refugees and economic migrants. All VBP arriving in HK on or after the cut-off date of 16 June 1988, would no longer automatically be considered as ‘refugees’, but rather as ‘asylum seekers’. This new status had them immediately transferred to detention camps to await screening. If screened-in as a refugee, the applicant was moved to a refugee camp to await

resettlement; if screened-out as a non-refugee, the applicant was advised that he/she had a right to a review, but would in the interim be detained in detention centres pending repatriation to Vietnam.

Evidently, the British HK Government's two 'human deterrence' measures proved insufficient to stop a second influx of VBP. More than 34,000 VBP arrived during 1989. Moreover, the financial cost to build detention centres and to look after more than 50,000 VBP in 1989, amounted to almost half a billion HK dollars.

In addition to the difficult task of finding accommodation for the thousands of new arrivals, there were pressures from different sources and more problems for the British HK Government to deal with. For instance, warnings from China officials about wanting the VBP situation resolved before the handover in 1997, even though it was still a decade away; the opposition to the 'screening policy' and forced repatriation met with a hunger strike at various Detention Centres involving more than 10,000 VBP (see photo 3.5); increasing fights with dangerous weapons between groups of Vietnamese from different regions, an increase in criminal activities among gangs within detention centres; the opposition by local people against the construction of refugee detention centres; and addressing the petitions parents signed against the Government placing VBP students in local schools.



Photo 3.5. VBP protest at Chi Ma Wan, May 1992. Source: SCMP

For the Vietnamese, life in the camp was filled with nervousness and anxiety. The detainees were afraid of being repatriated to Vietnam and at the same time scared of being bullied by members of internal gangs. Especially at Whitehead, one of the largest detention centres, which held well over 25,000 detainees.

Ultimately, it was the Comprehensive Plan of Action (CPA), formulated at the Indochinese Refugees Conference in Geneva in June 1989 that provided the international framework, which enabled the British HK Government to resolve the VBP issue. It had both endorsed the 'screening policy' and agreed on the principles that should underpin the repatriation of non-refugees.

The British HK Government took great effort to encourage Vietnamese people to return home voluntarily, however, of the population of more than 50,000 VBP only 264 volunteered to go back. Although the condition in the detention centres was hostile, some detainees said they would rather live behind barbwire in HK than in fear and poverty in Vietnam (Anderson and Atta, 1990). Others did not want to return because they saw it as losing their last chance to get to a Western country. However, according to Brian Bresnihan, the then Government's Refugee Coordinator: "the greatest single factor about not wanting to return was loss of face – [as] their extended families [had] made great sacrifices, paid a lot of money, to send them here" (Moira, The Vancouver Sun, 3 Jan 1995). In December 1989, the British HK Government implemented a forced Repatriation Scheme. Fifty-one Vietnamese who were screened-out were returned to Vietnam against their will. This action led to an international outcry, the British HK Government subsequently called off the forced repatriation program. Detainees piled up. The pressure to repatriate coupled with tension inside the camps sparked many riots and protests from the VBP that became more violent and grew larger in scale. A major riot broke out at the Whitehead Detention Centre in May 1990, that required 1,200 police officers and more than 100 rounds of teargas to control. Reports from the Government's Refugee Coordinator claim, there were VBP who went so far as to commit suicide in protest against repatriation.

The UNHCR, then offered a cash incentive for VBP to return to Vietnam voluntarily. Furthermore, a program worth US\$127 million was initiated by the European Community to improve the quality of life of returnees. Under this program, returnees were eligible for a variety of economic benefits. This could also apply to loans to start business ventures. Funds were similarly made available for vocational training. This



new scheme proved to be very effective and as a result, more than 6,000 Vietnamese volunteered to return to Vietnam to start business after vocational training.

In 1991, an additional of 20,200 VBP arrived. Among the new arrivals were some 'Double-Backers', they were the Vietnamese who came to HK, returned to Vietnam once and benefitted from the UNHCR repatriation assistance, then re-entered HK the second time.

By the end of the year, the number of VBP in HK peaked at 64,300. The annual cost to look after the VBP in HK during 1991, was \$1.2 billion, the highest since the VBP crisis began. Both the British HK Government and the people of HK became increasingly more frustrated with this huge increase. The VBP also found it much harder to cope as the condition in detention centres became progressively more overcrowded.

A significant nomenclature change also occurred. From this point onward, the British HK Government referred to all new arrivals from Vietnam as 'Vietnamese illegal immigrants'. This facilitated the signing of a Statement of Understanding between the Vietnamese Government and the UK/British HK Government concerning the return of Vietnamese illegal immigrants in HK through the Orderly Repatriate Program (ORP). The program applied to all new arrivals designated 'illegal immigrants' and to all 'illegal Vietnamese immigrants' then in detention centres. On 8 November, the Government began to repatriate VBP under the ORP.

Under the new policy and agreements put in place to speed up the repatriation of non-refugees in HK, was the Vietnam Government's insistence they be paid money for each Vietnamese returnee. The UK British HK Government agreed to meet their demand and contributed \$10 million to specifically finance small-scale infrastructure projects in the areas in Vietnam that had spawned the most 'illegal' (economic) immigrants.

Although in February 1994, during a meeting at the Geneva headquarters, the UN High Commissioner, Sadako Ogata said that the VBP chapter is coming to an end in Indochina and Southeast Asia (Henry Kamm, 1994), the VBP situation in HK dragged on until May 2000. Vietnamese people continued to arrive in HK, at the rate of between 300 and 1,000 each year.

After HK was returned to China in 1997, about 2,000 VBP awaiting resettlement or repatriation still remained in HK. About half of them, who had arrived in HK before June 1988, were automatically granted refugee status. Among this group of VBP, some were born in HK and some had drug problems, criminal records or both. They were unable to obtain resettlement opportunities overseas and the Vietnamese Government did not allow them back into the country. In February 2000, the HK Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) announced a Widened Local Resettlement Scheme to allow the remaining VBP to apply for resettlement in HK. On 1 June 2000, the last Vietnamese refugee camp in HK was closed. The 25-year VBP crisis in HK was finally over.

### **3.3 Summary of the VBP Crisis in HK**

A summary of the VBP expenditure, actual numbers of arrivals and camps are presented in tables 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3, and photo 3.6 shows a geographical map of the Vietnamese refugee camps and detention centres. The highest peak in arrivals was 1979 as a result from the persecution of ethnic Chinese by the Vietnamese communist government. These people were seeking asylum fleeing for their lives and the HK Government looked for help from the international community to handle such large numbers of arrivals which impeded the normal life and planned developments in the British colony. The situation was very different ten years later, when the second peak of VBP influx was observed. Britain and China had already signed and ratified a treaty agreement for the return of Hong Kong. Resettling VBP became a major priority but the new arrivals by far were not identified as refugees. The attitudes towards them and the nature of treatment changed. Nevertheless, the HK Government continued to take care of all arrivals while seeking resettlement options, including repatriation.

In total 24 refugee camps and detention centres were used during the 1975–2000 period. The total expenditure exceeds HK\$8 billion only between 1979 and 1996. This was a massive exercise of saving human lives and providing new opportunities. Not everything went smoothly and people from both sides of the fences experienced hardships. Their feelings, experiences and voices have been largely missing from the literature on the HK crisis. The next chapter analyses the VBP crisis in HK, using texts from the oral interviews and presenting views on the whole situation by former VBP and the people involved in their treatment. Lessons drawn from this analysis together with a conclusion containing the research findings complete the exegesis.

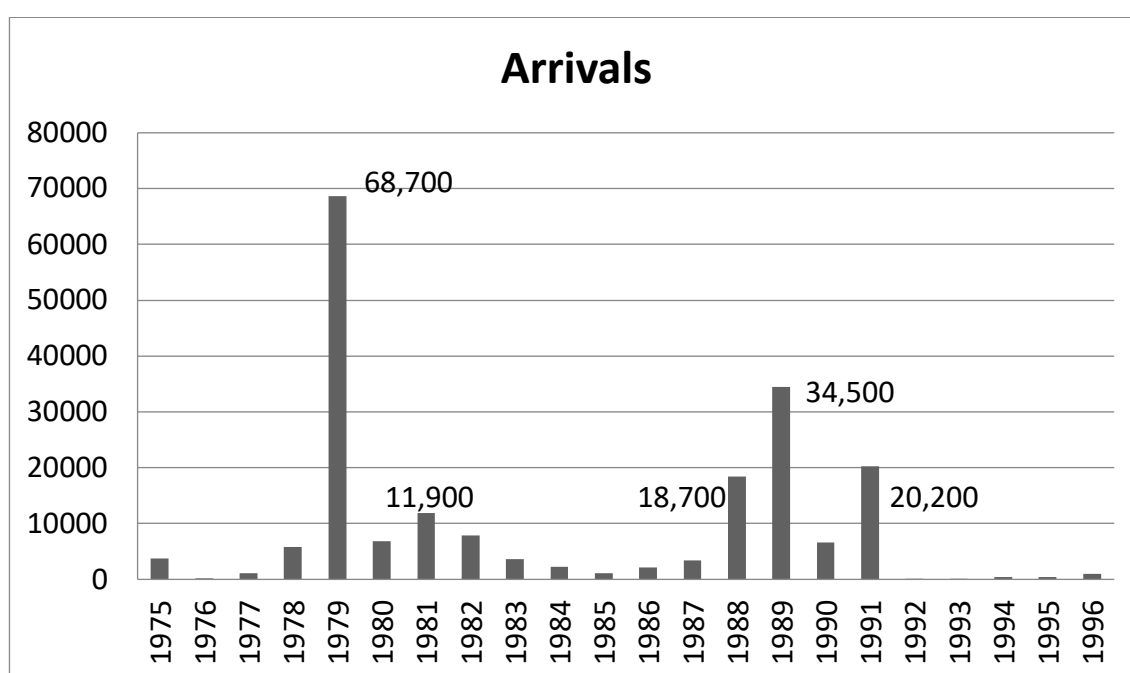
**Table 3.1. Expenditures on Vietnamese Migrants in HK - A summary of the expenditure incurred by the HK Government, the British Government and the UNHCR on the care and maintenance of Vietnamese migrants in HK**

Source: HK Government, January 1996

Year	HK Government	British Government	UNHCR	Total Expenditures
79/80 to 88/89	HK\$ 1,316 million		HK\$ 146 million	HK\$ 1,462 million
89/90	HK\$ 819 million	HK\$ 215 million	HK\$ 128 million	HK\$ 1,162 million
90/91	HK\$ 919 million	HK\$ 185 million	HK\$ 182 million	HK\$ 1,286 million
91/92	HK\$ 879 million	HK\$ 202 million	HK\$ 238 million	HK\$ 1,319 million
92/93	HK\$ 1,011 million	HK\$ 98 million	HK\$ 250 million	HK\$ 1,359 million
93/94	HK\$ 908 million	HK\$ 111 million	HK\$ 189 million	HK\$ 1,208 million
94/95	HK\$ 763 million	HK\$ 89 million	HK\$ 132 million	HK\$ 984 million
95/96	HK\$ 754 million	HK\$ 81 million	HK\$ 115 million	HK\$ 950 million
<b>Total</b>	<b>HK\$ 7,369 million</b>	<b>HK\$ 981 million</b>	<b>HK\$ 1,380 million</b>	<b>HK\$ 8,268 million</b>

**Table 3.2. Arrivals of Vietnamese Migrants in HK**

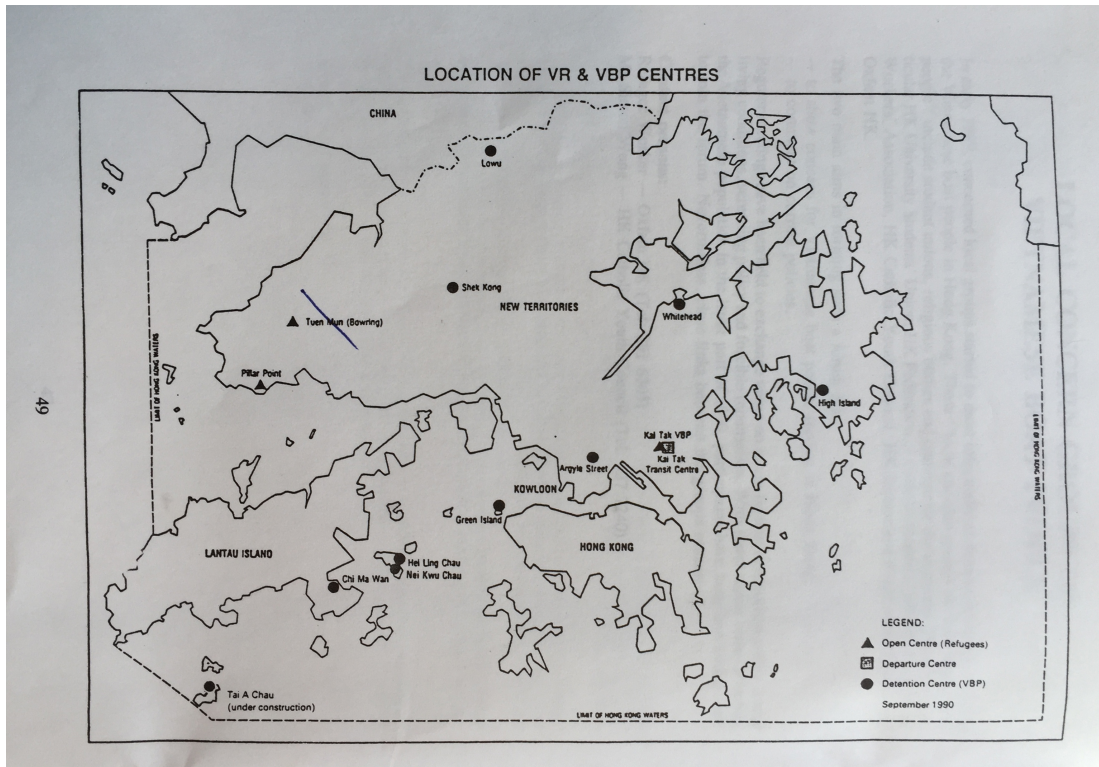
Source: HK Government, January 1996 and other HK Government Annual Reports



**Table 3.3. Vietnamese Refugee Camps and Detention Centres in Hong Kong from 1975 to 2000**

Source: Chan, 2013; The Refugee Concern Hong Kong Directory, 1991

CENTRE	PARTICULARS
<b>Argyle</b>	Opened in 1979 as ‘Open-Centre’; became Detention Centre in 1988
<b>Cape Collinson</b>	Opened in 1988 as Detention Centre
<b>Chi Ma Wan - Lower</b>	Opened in 1982 as ‘Closed-Centre’; became Detention Centre in 1988
<b>Chi Ma Wan - Upper</b>	Opened in 1985 as ‘Closed-Centre’; became Detention Centre in 1988
<b>Erskine</b>	Opened in 1988 as Detention Centre
<b>Green Island Reception Centre</b>	Served as a first station for initial documentation and medical screening for all new arrivals
<b>Hei Ling Chau</b>	Opened in 1982 as ‘Closed-Centre’; became Detention Centre in 1988
<b>High Island</b>	Opened in 1989 as Detention centre
<b>Jubilee</b>	Opened in 1979 as ‘Open-Centre’
<b>Kai Tak Departure Centre</b>	Opened in 1979; served as departure centre
<b>Kai Tak Open-Centre</b>	Opened in 1979 as ‘Open-Centre’
<b>Kai Tak Transit Centre</b>	Opened in 1979; served as an ‘Open-centre’
<b>Lo Wu Detention Centre</b>	Served as Voluntary Repatriation Transit Centre
<b>Nei Ku Chau</b>	Opened in 1989 as Detention-Centre; its population was mainly made up of ethnic Chinese
<b>New Horizons</b>	Opened in 1979 as ‘Open-Centre’
<b>Pillar Point</b>	Opened in 1989 as a Refugee Centre
<b>Shek Kwu Chau</b>	Opened in 1989 as Detention Centre
<b>Sham Shui Po</b>	Opened in 1979 as ‘Open-Centre’
<b>Shek Kong</b>	Opened in 1989 as Detention Centre
<b>Shek Wu Hui</b>	Opened in 1979 as ‘Open-Centre’
<b>Stone Cutter</b>	Opened in 1988 as Detention Centre
<b>Tai A Chau</b>	Opened in 1991 as Detention Centre; detainees were allowed to access to all parts of the island
<b>Tuen Mun</b>	Opened in 1985 as a Reception Centre; became an ‘Open-Centre in 1990
<b>White Head</b>	The largest Detention Centre with population of approximately 22,500 detainees



**Photo 3.6. Map of Vietnamese refugee camps and detention centres**  
**Source: The Refugee Concern group Hong Kong Directory, 1991**

## **Chapter 4 : Interview Analysis, Research Findings and Conclusion**

After the Vietnam War ended in April 1975, the destruction it caused, the Vietnamese communist government policies, and further conflicts with neighbouring countries prompted hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese to leave their country in unseaworthy boats to Southeast Asian countries and Hong Kong (HK), which at that time was a British colony. They became known to the world as ‘Vietnamese boat people’ (VBP). Starting more than four decades ago, the VBP crisis plagued HK for 25 years. One of the most densely populated places in the world became one of the safest havens for Vietnamese refugees. For the HK authorities, however, it was two and a half decades of struggles with the never-ending arrivals of VBP, plus a large contingent of Ex-China Vietnamese Illegal Immigrants (ECVII), who went to China during 1978/79 and had already been accepted by this country as refugees. It was a constant struggle in searching for accommodation and resettlement opportunities for over 200,000 VBP as well as addressing the challenges in keeping the VBP safe against natural disasters such as typhoons and monsoon; international scrutiny of its detention centres and its forced repatriation scheme; numerous legal battles regarding its refugee screening procedure; on-going riots and disturbances in refugee camps; criticism from the public; and pressure from China to solve the situation before the hand-over. The repatriation programs were complex and came at a significant cost: \$7.8 billion was carried by the HK British Government and HK\$1 billion by the a UNHCR (Carvalho, 2015). Notwithstanding the mounting costs, international pressure and many other complexities, the HK British government never turned away a single boat person.

This exegesis so far examined the VBP crisis in HK from 1975 to 2000. In this chapter, I assess the findings from my study in relation to the methodology and theoretical perspective utilised to gather and analyse the collected data. The answer to the main research question is provided together with a summary of the contributions made by the PhD thesis. I also identify the lessons that can be drawn from this research on the VBP HK predicament.

## 4.1 Analysis of the Interviews

Several common themes emerged from the interviews, namely: *cultural differences* between the VBP and the rescue workers; *rescuing* the Vietnamese; the *survival* instinct of the Vietnamese. They are discussed in turn below.

### *Cultural differences*

Queuing and waiting in line for a turn is common in Western societies. However, the Vietnamese, at the time, were not accustomed to this common practice, which expresses cultural values, such as egalitarianism and orderliness (Mann, 1969 [https://www.jstor.org/stable/2775696?seq=1#page\\_scan\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/2775696?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents)). When they first arrived in the camps, instead of lining up to receive food at meal times, some Vietnamese just rushed in and grabbed the food. These were perceived as annoying and unacceptable behaviours by some rescue workers who had not been exposed to different cultural practices in less organised societies. Similarly, several interviewees discussed having to give the VBP orientation on how to use the toilets and sanitary napkins because they thought that the Vietnamese, especially those who came from villages, needed ‘to become used to a modern life’.



Marry Hutchinson (Hutchinson & Dorsett, 2012) who helps many refugees in Australia as Social Worker, explains that when working with clients from diverse cultures, ‘cultural competency’ is essential and it involves gathering knowledge about different cultures and learning from her own interactions with clients. She says: “practitioners do not privilege their ideals, values and belief systems over other people’s worldviews” (Hutchinson & Dorsett, 2012, p. 71). Like some of the rescue workers in HK, sometimes she finds it difficult to sit with such cultural difference and finds herself reflecting on her Western ideas, values and beliefs. These cultural differences often influence consciously or unconsciously the interactions with clients (Hutchinson & Dorsett, 2012, p. 72).

Cultural differences permeated every aspect of the lives in the refugee camps – from food habits to religious customs and conversation topics. They also impacted the way VBP communicated between themselves and with the authorities. Little attempt was made from both sides of the fence to bridge the gaps because of the wrong assumptions that the expected respective behaviours were clearly normal and should be anticipated. This caused frustration from the VBP and the people who dealt with them. It also created cultural division, unacceptance of each other and reluctance to appreciate any efforts made to reconcile the difficult situation.

Many VBP in HK experienced the loss of their cultural identity, which according to Becker and Bhugra (2005) can impact their mental well-being. Some of the components of cultural identity include religion, rites of passage, dietary habits and leisure activities. They explain that religion can preserve values within the community and foster a sense of belonging, and following rites or rituals is bound to influence the degree to which an individual will be accepted within a cultural group.

Moreover, Becker and Bhugra (2005) claim that food preparation, music, movies, sports, and literature are the important elements in allowing an individual to feel part of their culture while living in a place with a different culture. These essential elements were missing in the lives of the VBP while they stayed in the detention centres in HK.

At the time of the events, nobody expected the VBP crisis to last for 25 years. With a hindsight, it might have been necessary to put in place cultural awareness programs for all involved. However, the presumption was that the VBP were there only temporarily and not much work was done to bridge the cultural divide. Any such efforts were the result from individuals taking the initiative to help rather than a concerted effort to develop a common ground.

### ***Rescuing***

It is evident that all VBP were rescued by the HK Government and the people of HK when they arrived. After the VBP disembarked the boat they used to travel to HK, they were given shelter, food, medical care and other basic needs. Several interviewed rescuers and government officials expressed their concern for the boat people and how they felt sorry for them. One civil servant said: “after looking at their faces and their conditions on these small boats you realise they have gone through a very difficult journey... I could not imagine how it would be if I were them. How could I survive? And then I put myself in this position. Then why should I reject them? After this difficult period, they should be welcomed with care.”

Another interviewee said: “Although they only stay in HK temporarily, we pray for them. We give them a place to stay, a roof over their head, and provide them medical care, food and support.”

Rescuing the people in need was considered a natural humanitarian act and immediate reaction to prevent potential loss of lives. For example, providing assistance to any person *in distress* at sea is a clear legal requirement under international maritime law, which is also firmly based on a deep-rooted moral obligation which the shipping industry has always accepted without question. As stated in the shipping industry Guidance published in 2014 by the International Chamber of Shipping (ICS), “nation States and ships have an obligation to assist persons in distress at sea, regardless of their nationality, status or the circumstances in which they are found.” (Large scale rescue operations at sea, [www.ics-shipping.org/docs/.../refugee...rescue/large-scale-rescue-operations-at-sea.pdf](http://www.ics-shipping.org/docs/.../refugee...rescue/large-scale-rescue-operations-at-sea.pdf)).

According to Durieux (2016 <https://academic.oup.com/ijrl/article-abstract/28/4/637/2548395>), international refugee law continues to be ill-equipped to handle large population movements. During all years of the VBP crisis, the “responsibility to protect” political doctrine was the basis for the response by the HK Government which immediately provided refuge and adjusted the limited resources it had to accommodate the constant influx of refugees.

The international community also responded but although attempts were made for a coordinated approach to resettling the refugees, the process was slow, protracted and prolonged. Part of the reason is the fact that the VBP were essentially safe in HK and only the political pressure from the hand-over to China put an explicit deadline and imposed reinforced responsibility to the world. The duty of the HK Government was to rescue the refugees from immediate peril, which it did by providing them temporal refuge.

As Durieux (2016) describes, there is no “home” for the duty to rescue and protect, and no particular country should bear the responsibility. The response and obligation should rest with the international community and organisations, such as the United Nations, UNHCR, ICM, IOM, RCC and NGOs, to negotiate a plan of action which can assure that these people are safe from risk and have opportunities for decent life.

### *Survival*

It was obvious that the VBP were survivors. Firstly, they experienced circumstances in Vietnam which drove them to leave the country, then they survived the boat journeys that were mostly harrowing. Once in HK, they endured a new set of challenges, including living in camps that were poor conditioned, waiting for a long time for resettlement, worrying about being sent back to Vietnam where their lives could have been endangered.

One camp manager described the VBP as ‘resilient’, he said: “they were incredibly resilient and resourceful in whatever they were doing, even in the way they went about their day-to-day task”. Many correctional service officers who worked closely with the VBP in detention camps recognized that the VBP possessed incredible survival skills. One officer explained that when the Vietnamese people were in a desperate situation they would make unbelievable things for themselves out of the materials they could find in the camps. For example, they devised home-made weapons, shields, even gas masks made from plastic bottles, cotton balls and charcoal. The conditions in the detention camps were often overcrowded, substandard and did not always provide for the “right to enjoy” asylum as stated in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Edwards, 2005 <https://academic.oup.com/ijrl/article/17/2/293/1548262>). Nevertheless, the VBP adapted and survived.

According to Pulvirenti and Mason (2011), the resilience of refugees is not a personal trait but a process during which certain survival qualities are developed. Hutchinson and Dorsett (2012) contend that support, religion and spirituality are major factors contributing to a refugee's resilience. They emphasize the importance of family, friends and community in reinforcing resilience. For example, religion is linked to enhancing a person's psychological and physical wellbeing and 'spirituality assisted refugees to cope through hard times (Hutchinson and Dorsett 2012, p. 61).

Hutchison (2012, p. 56-58) also claims that despite facing many trials prior to arriving in Australia, many refugee people demonstrate enormous strength and resilience that enable them to go on to thrive in their new country and surroundings. The VBP were particularly good at this and many of them established the foundations for successful lives and careers following resettlement.

## **4.2 Theoretical Assessment and Methodology**

The subject of VBP in HK has attracted research attention previously. As explained earlier, the latest works of Thomas (2000), Chan (2013) and Law (2014) represent an amplitude of important issues – from the socio-cultural dynamics of the Vietnamese asylums in detention camps (Thomas, 2000) to the differences between North Vietnamese, South Vietnamese, and Chinese-Vietnamese, and how they lead to conflicts (Chan, 2013) and the psychological effects of detention camps on incarcerated children (Law, 2014). The HK Government's treatments of VBP, particularly during riots (Thomas, 2000), the return of repatriated VBP (Chan, 2013)

and the heavy financial burden on the HK Government (Law, 2014) are also issues that have been analysed.

However, for the first time these important perspectives are being supplemented and augmented by the witness stories of those who experienced the VBP crisis. The combination of grounded theory and oral history allowed for this historical period to be better understood. Oral history provided not only interview materials recorded in full on the created website, but also generated a range of other artefacts – photos, diaries, pictures, drawings, maps and videos, which bring the faces, voices, feelings, recollections and experiences to the forefront of the VBP’s saga interpretation.

Apart from the desire to preserve history, my research was driven by the limited focus of the research carried out to-date on the history of VBP in HK. The main contribution of this research to the existing knowledge of VBP in HK, presented in this exegesis and on the website (<http://www.vietnameseboatpeople.hk/>), is a comprehensive account which includes the previously missing voices of those who witnessed this fraught period in HK history from the beginning to the end, including perspectives from all stakeholders: the VBP, government officials and NGOs.

Grounded theory provided the framework to combine personal interviews and archival data to crystallise the main insights from the participants’ narratives. The former VBP in HK and the people who dealt with them, such as: policy makers, government officials and staff of non-profit organizations, were able to highlight their viewpoints and by doing so informed the theory development. Creating this collective memory is the basis to explain the events of 1975–2000.

Full interviews and other tangible/intangible material gathered from the interviewees and various other sources are displayed on the website. The creative component and other outcome of this PhD – the website, also presents the complete history of VBP in HK from 1975 to 2000, but under a different format. On the website, the VBP stories are told in the actual voices of the participants. In addition, the enormity of the riots become alive through the sounds and images depicted in videos and the emotions and hopes held by the refugees are illustrated through hundreds of paintings created at the time from inside the detention centres.

The first section to follow presents selected interview excerpts from the three groups of interviewed participants – namely VBP, people who interacted with them and British officials. This is followed by a description of the themes generated from the collective memory and the outline of the theoretical understanding that this research generated.

### **4.3 Collective Memory**

Reflecting on the predicament that HK had endured for a quarter of a century, below are observations and memories from some former VBP in HK and some of the people who had first-hand experience with the administration of the VBP crisis, or lived through it as citizens of HK. This section includes parts of some of the interviews. The complete interviews can be found in the website: <http://vietnameseboatpeople.hk/oral-history/>. They represent the collective memory constructed through the oral history methodology applied in this study.

## **A. Volunteers, NGOs, Contractors and HK Citizens:**

**Penelope Mathew**, a volunteer lawyer from Australia who spent 12 weeks in HK in 1992 as to specifically assist VBP in the camps, to understand the ‘refugee definition’ that the British HK Government was using to explain whether or not their stories fitted the definition criteria for refugee, recounted:

I thought, how do you justify particularly prolonged periods in administrative detention for people who haven’t committed a crime...the idea that you can detain someone simply because they are seeking protection as a refugee, and that you will continue to detain them until their claim has been determined, seemed to me to be wrong. (<http://vietnameseboatpeople.hk/oral-history/penelope-matthew/>).

In contrast, **Siew Mei**, who started to work with the VBP in HK in 1986, under the *Save the Children* organization, sympathized with the British HK Government for the difficult situation they were having to deal with. Mei explained that it was a very complex situation as the Government was ‘kicking out’ cousins or friends of their own people, and simultaneously being expected to embrace the VBP. Mei noted: “They cannot be too kind to refugees from all over the world, whereas they have very strict rules for their own people. [even so] For the dilemma they were in, they (according to Siew Mei) handled it very well.” (<http://vietnameseboatpeople.hk/oral-history/siew-mei/>).

**Alan Yee**, a citizen of HK, who was a teenager at the time the VBP started to arrive in HK, shared his opinion:



In the late 70s, I saw on TV a lot of boat people from Vietnam were coming to HK. By that time, I did not have much feeling about this. But eventually, the boat people kept on coming into HK. We needed to find some place to provide them with food and shelter. I think it became a problem for HK.

Everyone who watched TV was concerned with the number VBP coming to HK, and wondered when it would stop... I wondered how they would survive in a small place like HK, and that was my concern. I think the Government did a very good job in the given situation. (<http://vietnameseboatpeople.hk/oral-history/alan-yeec/>).

**James Ginns**, who was contracted by the St Stephen Society to manage Pillar Point Refugee Camp from 1995 to 1997, observed: “Everybody was in limbo at Pillar Point”. Ginns explained, they were the ‘remnant’ of the Vietnamese population in HK and were there for a number of reasons that had stopped them from being resettled up to that point, “you can’t resettle criminals and drug addicts.” They either had acquired a criminal record since coming to HK, had a drug problem, were mentally or physically handicapped, or had family members who fell under these categories. Amongst the Pillar Point population, Ginns claims there were quite a lot of very vulnerable people, especially those who were mentally handicapped, and they had shut themselves into their rooms and hardly went outside to avoid being abused and bullied by the other camp residents.

Ginns recalled: “It was a security nightmare”, Pillar Point had Chinese gangs on the ‘outside trading drugs to Vietnamese gangs on the ‘inside’. There was a lot of violence in the camp, mainly related to drugs and male addicts who beat their wives and

children. Ginns said: “When I first arrived, there were eight to ten ambulances being called a day for different incidents”. It was a tough place, particularly, for children to grow up in. Little children were running around and stabbing their feet on needles. In his opinion, “it is really sad, they were stuck there, largely because of their parents”.

Regardless of the poor condition of the camps, Ginns remarked:

In my view, HK deserves a lot of credit. I don’t know much about what happened in Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia but I do know that generally, the experience of refugees in HK was better than what happened in those other places. And they were generally given shelter, and not pulled back out to sea. And ultimately, many – if not most – were resettled. So I think it would be fair to say that HK, over all, did a good job. (<http://vietnameseboatpeople.hk/oral-history/james-ginns/>).

## **B. Vietnamese boat people in HK:**

**Dai Le**, who came to HK in 1979, with her mother and two sisters by boat. They arrived when the influx was at its peak. The numbers of VBP arrivals were between 600 and 1,000 each day. At that time, HK had had a population of around five million.

Le said:

To put this into perspective, Australia has seven times more people than HK. Its dense population, coupled with its economic and social issues, should have made HK less tolerant of asylum seekers. Yet the British HK Government set up emergency accommodation to house hundreds and thousands of Vietnamese boat arrivals, including my family (Le, 2016).

(<http://vietnameseboatpeople.hk/oral-history/dai-le/>).

**T.H. Vu** was 14 years old when she came to HK in 1987. She was by herself and did not know anyone on the boat. Vu was transferred to many refugee camps during her 10 years stay in HK. Her last refugee camp was Pillar Point, which was also the last one in HK. According to Vu, most of the refugees in this camp had been in HK for ten years or more.

Vu described life in Pillar Point as especially appalling, with each family crammed into a very small room, sometimes with as many as seven people. She also claimed that the majority of families always stayed inside with the door closed. They also cooked their meals in the room. In each room, there was a small hole that lead to the sewage. The families would discard rubbish and food through the hole. There were only a few toilets in the whole camp, which were very filthy. The one nearest to Vu's room would take at least a fifteen-minute walk. Vu divulged that she and her roommates, who were also drug addicts, would use the hole in their room as the toilet. Hence, the room always smelled very bad, and if they forgot to cover the hole, rats and cockroaches would come up.

According to Vu, some people felt homesick, especially the older ones, and wished to return to Vietnam but the Vietnamese Government would not accept them. She thinks one of the reasons the Vietnamese Government was not keen on this particular group of refugees was because there was no financial incentive in accepting them.

Vu said that there was no hope of a future for herself and many people in Pillar Point. In despair, many turned to drugs, and then ended their lives by drug poisoning or

overdose. Days and nights, these people would stay behind the closed doors, took drugs and when some people died, their body would be left outside the door.

Inevitably, Vu also resorted to drugs and often had thoughts of suicide. She disclosed: “If it wasn’t for my baby, I would have easily killed myself. All I had to do was inject a little bit more of a drug into my veins”. It was James Ginns who sent Vu to St Stephens for drug rehabilitation treatment and organized for her daughter to go to primary school, while she received the treatment (<http://vietnameseboatpeople.hk/oral-history/huong-thanh-vu/>).

**Paul Wong** was eight years old when he arrived in HK with his parents and younger brother in 1989. Wong’s parents went to China from Vietnam in 1979, and Wong was born in Guangzhou in 1981. From 1989 to 1996, Wong and his family were transferred from camp to camp every six months, except for the Pillar Point, where they stayed nearly two years. Wong explained that the reason they had to move so often was because the “camp management did not want the refugees to settle down, become friends and then perhaps form gangs and create conflicts.” Nonetheless, some of the refugees did anyway.

Wong described one of the camps, the Green Island as: “Just like being in a prison, we could play on the playground but needed to be back by 5pm and to be locked up in the hut until the morning.” He said that in some of the camps there was a lot of fighting, which frightened him and his family. They worried about being caught up in the fight and getting injured. Wong revealed in the feeling of being ‘free’ after he left the refugee camps: “There were no more fences. Whichever apartment we stayed in after that had no fence. That was the biggest difference about living outside the camps”.

Looking back, Wong now thinks on the years in the camp as a positive experience. He believes that if his father had not brought them to HK, they would still be in Guangzhou like everyone else. Wong claims, the whole experience has given him very good training in facing challenges in life. “The best thing is that every problem has a solution”, said Wong. (<http://vietnameseboatpeople.hk/oral-history/paul-wong/>).

**Duc Truong** and his wife arrived in HK in September 1982. They were kept in closed camps for 22 months until they left for Australia. Truong’s first camp was Chi Ma Wan. He described the camp as about the size of a football field, and that it held about 4,000 VBP, at that time. The camp had nine huts, a kitchen, a medical clinic, toilets and a basketball court.

Truong recalled there were lots of fights in the camp between North Vietnamese and South Vietnamese. The ratio of the two groups in the camp was about 50:50. Truong explained the level of the fights – the small ones involved two to four people, medium ones involved about 20 to 30 and large ones literally involved everyone. The small fights occurred about every few days, the medium fights about every few weeks and the large ones about every two months. He said: “when we go to the toilets, we never go alone, always a group of twenty to thirty people because if we walk around the camp alone, we could easily be picked on by the Northerners for no particular reasons”.

Truong said his worst memory in HK occurred the day after his wife gave birth to their baby girl by caesarean section. A nurse at the public hospital pushed her from behind and told her to walk downstairs with the baby in her arms from the seventh floor, while she was in great pain. There were elevators, but she was not allowed to use them.

Reflecting on the experience as refugees, Truong said, there were some individuals who treated them unkindly and looked down on them. However, as a whole, the British HK Government's policy was humanitarian. "I am grateful that the Government accepted us, the VBP, gave us shelters and helped us find resettlement."

[\(http://vietnameseboatpeople.hk/oral-history/duc-truong/\)](http://vietnameseboatpeople.hk/oral-history/duc-truong/).

**M. Huynh** and his family arrived in HK in late November 1978. They were placed in the very first refugee camp established at the old British military base. Huynh describes life in the camp as 'great'. The camp was very big and had a lot of empty spaces, since there were not that many refugee arrivals during that time. Each person, including children, received HK\$8 per day, which Huynh said was more than enough for everyone to eat well. They were free to leave the camp anytime they wanted, and they could easily find work at factories or in small businesses nearby.

Huynh noted that at that time that the Government staffs were friendly, and the HK people were kind and helpful. The UNHCR even allowed them to use a large room to hold a farewell party whenever refugees were leaving for resettlement in another country.

He said, "I really appreciate the British HK Government. They embraced the VBP and my family and treated us very well. Comparing HK to my country, it was like two different worlds. I felt very lucky". Huynh further recalled how he and his family were forced out of their own home and sent to the New Economic Zone (NEZ) by the communist government, where they barely survived.

[\(http://vietnameseboatpeople.hk/oral-history/m-huynh/\)](http://vietnameseboatpeople.hk/oral-history/m-huynh/).

### **C. British HK Government Officials and Staff:**

**Bonnie Wong**, was a Prison Officer. In late 1978, Wong was posted to run the newly set-up centre for Vietnamese arrivals and she was in charge of the female section of the camp. She shared her thoughts and experience in dealing with VBP. Some humorous and others troublesome.

Wong was proud of her staff when recalling some of the stories about transporting VBP. One in particular was the time that they had shipped out 3,000 refugees and received exactly 3,000 new arrivals on the same day. She said it was tiring just watching her staff planning the receiving and transferring of VBP, not to mention the actual physical job: “I was totally exhausted when I was supervising the movement of the refugees. I don’t know how the staff survived”.

Another story Wong considered ‘funny’ was when her staff tried to transfer the Vietnamese from the pier to the camp. The main concern was safety because the road was quite steep and winding. So, the driver packed everyone into the lorries as tightly as possible so there was no movement, and he ordered everyone to squat so that the car would not rock. Wong explained: “That looks as if it is a harsh treatment, but it was only so the children wouldn’t get hurt”.

Wong remembered the times when there were only a few officers available to handle a few thousand Vietnamese coming to attack them with spears. They had to stand there because there was no alternative, because they couldn’t let the refugees get out. She said: “I admired those officers very much. In those times... [had to] ... think of amazing ways to get the job done”.

On a more serious note, Wong believes that over the years at least hundreds, if not thousands, of VBP died in the camps due to serious violent attacks and murder between North and South Vietnamese. She explained that the Vietnamese people made weapons that could perpetrate fatal wounds out of metal frames from their bunk beds and water pipes. Once they stabbed someone with a piece of sharpened water pipe and then pulled it out, the blood just kept draining out of the wound. This proved a very effective way of killing people. Wong noted: “there were lots of violence...[episodes]... in the camps, so much...[so]... that we had to...[place]... the Vietnamese in [separate]...camps – one camp for North Vietnamese and another for South Vietnamese. (<http://vietnameseboatpeople.hk/oral-history/bonnie-wong/>).

**Talbot Bashall**, a resident of Western Australia, also a former Controller of the Refugee Control Centre in HK, shared some of his memories in dealing with the VBP crisis:

The highest number of refugees we received in one day is indelibly imprinted in my memory: 4,516 on 10 June 1979 in 42 boats. We were nearly overcome. At the age of 52 at the time, I had seen what had happened in Europe after the Second World War. But I had never experienced anything like this before. Some of the boats that arrived had mothers with small children, their clothes in tatters, bloodstained and gory. I became an admirer of the stoicism and courage and the fortitude of these poor people. After undergoing unbelievable trials and tribulations they have become absolutely marvellous citizens of Australia. “At the end of the day, we can all go to sleep knowing that we did not tow any boat out to sea.” (<http://vietnameseboatpeople.hk/oral-history/talbot-bashall/>).



**Alistair Asprey**, former Chief of Security Branch in HK from 1990 to 1995, explained that the people of HK were not sympathetic to the VBP because “there was a feeling that they were using up a tremendous amount of HK resources... and that most of the people arriving were not genuine refugees but people in search of a better life”.

One of the challenging moments Asprey recalled was the time when they had to move 10,000 VBP on an island to somewhere else in very short notice because a typhoon was imminent. The task was achieved but with great difficulty.

Asprey specified:

I am very grateful that HK acted very honourably and compassionately to the Vietnamese. We didn't turn them away, we accepted them, we fed them, we housed them, we tried to make arrangements for their future. Whether or not their future was to be in resettlement or ...[back]...in Vietnam. Still I think my main feeling now is that I am proud that HK acted in the way it did. No doubt most of it would appear harsh at the time to most of the Vietnamese involved, but I think we tried hard to treat them as well as we could. (<http://vietnameseboatpeople.hk/oral-history/alistair-asprey/>).

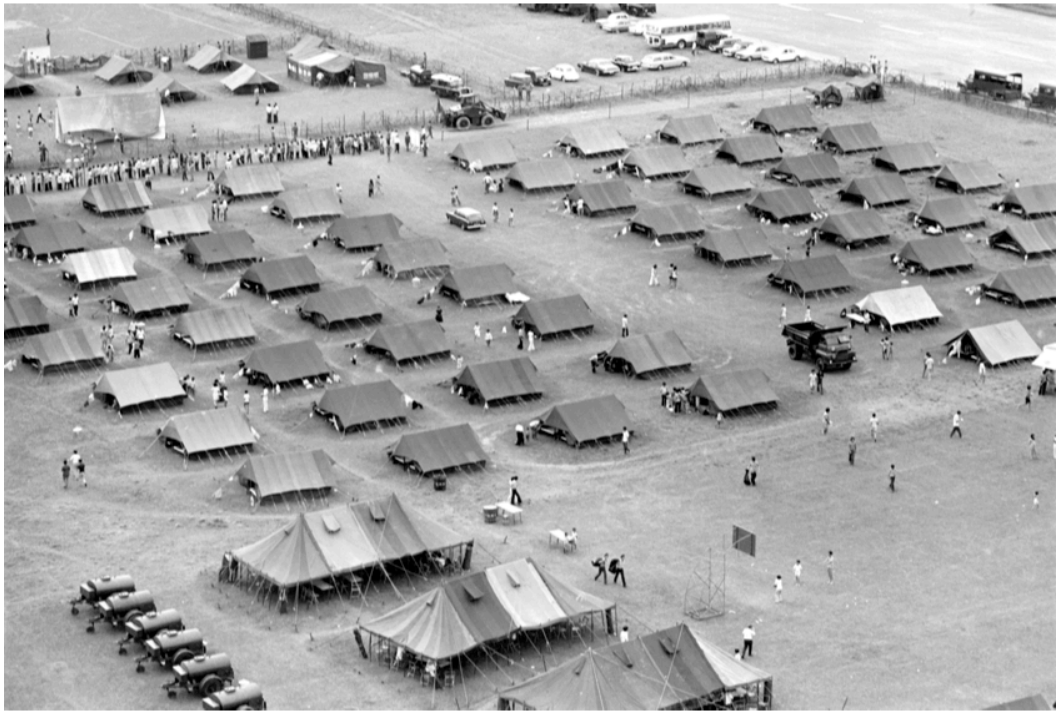
**Peter Lai**, former Chief of Security Branch in HK from 1995 to 1997, shared what the impact of dealing with the VBP crisis meant to him:

We did a good thing! It was difficult and sometimes bloody annoying, especially when they turned nasty. But it was a good thing, especially with the initial batch that came through the HK system – close to 100,000 – the bulk of them were regarded as refugees. Wherever they are now...[somewhere]... over the world... they have established new lives, they have integrated into society

and they may be teachers, doctors, nurses, business, technicians, etc. doing useful jobs for humanity. They have their own family, their children and grandchildren. Yet, they came through HK and what we did was let them have the opportunity to make a new life elsewhere. So yes, we did a good thing. (<http://vietnameseboatpeople.hk/oral-history/peter-lai/>).

**Carrie Yau**, former Principal Assistant Secretary Security of the Security Branch. During the 3-years she was involved in the VBP crisis, Yau was assigned some very challenging tasks. From the beginning of 1987, Yau was given the task of coordinating accommodation for VBP. She notes:

The influx of Vietnamese was beyond prediction, there could be very large numbers coming into tiny HK. We resorted to building tents or using army barracks to accommodate VBP (see photo 4.1). But because HK is in a typhoon zone, these kinds of temporary accommodation were not a sustainable way. We had to provide something that wasn't just tents that would be blown away by the winds. At the worst times, when they were coming in large numbers, we even had to put people on ferries. We would tie the ferries near the harbour. ...after you would try to fill all the pier areas, and then you had to move beyond land and put them on ferries. So, it was as desperate as that. HK is just so tiny and short of space.



**Photo 4.1. Temporary accommodation for VBP. Source: HK GIS**

In 1989, Yau was asked to look at the policy side of the situation for ‘durable solutions’. Concurrently, the Governor, Sir David Wilson was trying to tell the international community, if they wanted HK to continue to be a port of ‘first asylum for VBP’, they would have to play their part by taking their share of VBP for resettlement. She claimed: “They do not choose to come to stay in HK, this is only a first port of call, with a view to going to America, Canada, Australia, European countries, etc.”

Yau further explained: “Clearly the people coming into our place, their profile was changing. Now a lot of them were actually economic migrants who were trying to run away from starvation and wanting a better life.” In addition to being ‘fatigued’, because of their status, foreign countries did not want to take these people. In that case, the British HK Government had to find a durable solution in terms of repatriating them back to North Vietnam. First, the British HK Government tried voluntary repatriation,

then they offered incentive package for those who volunteered to go home, and those who were screened out, but did not volunteer would then be mandatorily repatriated.

Yau said:

Thinking back, I feel that it really is worth putting into the record... that little HK, not even a country, [was]... steering the world...[in]... how to find a ‘durable solution’. If you look at today, how many politicians and people look for duration solutions? Everything is about ‘quick wins’ or ‘quick fixes’. But in those days, real leadership qualities were judged by those who really had both the heart and the vision to work things out in the long-run.”

Reflecting on the VBP crisis, Yau assessed that, in looking back, there should be appreciation on each and every party’s side. She said:

It...[was]... a humanitarian problem that...happened. A problem that...put people to the test...[on]... all sides. The VBP became tougher having gone through the saga, we as civil servants became more competent because of all the tests we...[had to go]...through. The leaders – those who had to tackle the international politics or what not – also rose to the challenge. And HK also, for the first time, got onto the international map. And then people got to know about HK, because of this problem. So all this is quite meaningful to me. (<http://vietnameseboatpeople.hk/oral-history/carrie-yau/>).

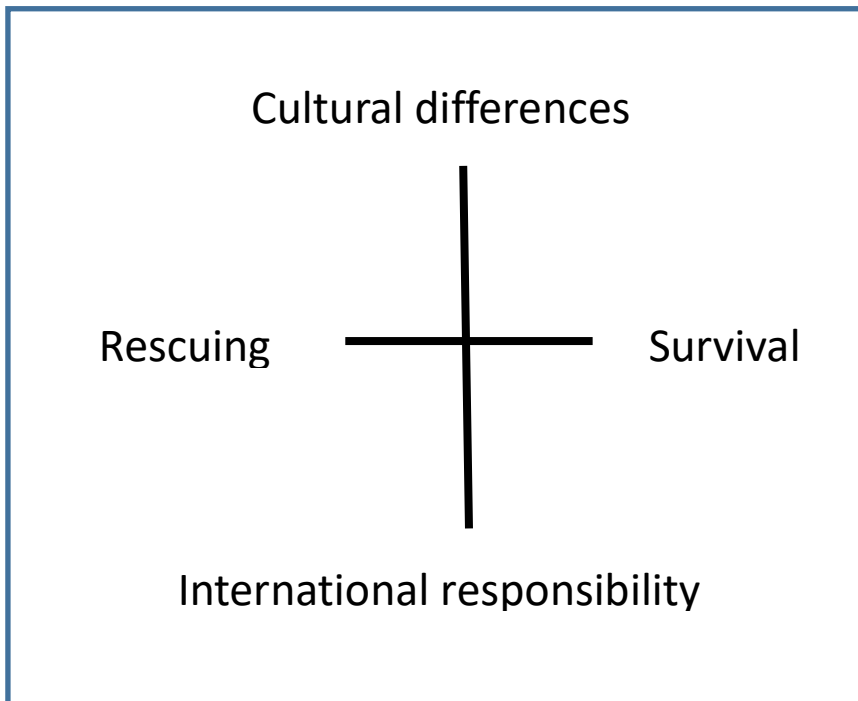
## **4.4 Both Sides of the Fence Theory**

The VBP crisis can only be understood with an account of the events from both sides of the fence which this PhD research was able to deliver by including the voices

representative of all groups of participants through oral history and by applying grounded theory. Put simply, the positions taken by the participants from both sides of the fence can be explained through the themes of rescuing and survival. Explaining the reaction of the HK people and Government through general principles, ideas and justifications for the course of their action can be represented by the responsibility for rescuing. On the other hand, the principles, ideas and justifications for the course of actions for the VBP can be represented as their capacity for survival. The cultural differences shape the environment at the interface of the two major themes – rescuing and survival. The practical outcomes produced at the intersection of rescue and survival in the VBP in HK is the need – then and in similar situations in the future – to generate international responsibility that will respond swiftly to such humanitarian crisis.

Figure 4.2 represents the theoretical model, which clarifies the four aspects required in dealing with refugee crises, namely: survival, rescue, cultural differences and international responsibility. Rescuing is a human responsibility entrenched not only in international conventions and treaties but also in a compassionate humanistic value system. Survival is in many aspects a human instinct but in a refugee crisis it also requires adaptation and the development of new skills and knowledge that can bridge the cultural differences. International responsibility is at the basis of any resolution of refugee crises. Not a single country would be able to act alone and provide the necessary conditions for immediate rescuing and decent long-term survival. A system that promotes rescuing, survival, acceptance of cultural differences and international responsibility can trigger a positive resolution of a refugee crisis.

**Figure 4.2. Both Sides of the Fence Model**



## **4.5 Research Findings and Lessons Drawn from the VBP Crisis in HK**

### **A. Research findings:**

The research question of this PhD thesis is: *How did Hong Kong respond to the 1975–2000 Vietnamese boat people crisis?* Both, the creative website and the exegesis helped answer this question. From this research, my findings note that:

- The extreme complexity of the situation and how it was perceived differently by the various stakeholders.
- Despite the complexities, how the HK Government managed to offer long-lasting support and home for a large number of people, without turning away anybody in need.

- Although the living conditions were not of a high standard, the way the VBP were treated allowed them to build individual and family resilience and capacity to deal with life's challenges.
- The people who processed and looked after the VBP showed a lot of sympathy and willingness to resolve the crisis without divulging responsibility to anybody else or any other country.
- Cultural differences had to be overcome by the VBP and the people who looked after them to avoid tensions and conflicts.
- Although it offered a lot of assistance, the international community did not take full responsibility for the VBP whilst Hong Kong did.

The developed Both Sides of the Fence model and theory identify the four major aspects of dealing with a transboundary refugee crisis (rescuing, survival, cultural differences and international responsibility) and helped explain the 25-year VBP crisis by including the voices of the people involved.

## **B. Lessons drawn from the Vietnamese boat people crisis in HK:**

This study, which undertook the most comprehensive historical coverage of the HK VBP crisis to date, was driven by a number of factors, including the desire to tell the full story from all sides of the fence: refugees, government and NGOs, to identify lessons that can be learnt from the way in which the HK Government handled the crisis. I articulate the most important lessons in the list below:

1. The HK Government alone could not resolve this monumental task, it required a **join-effort and commitments from other countries.** The research also

established that the VBP crisis in HK was greatly affected and influenced by the policies and movements of other countries. For example, the influx of VBP in 1979, was the result of the Vietnam Government's expulsion of the ethnic Chinese and the push-back refugee activities being executed by Thailand and Malaysia.

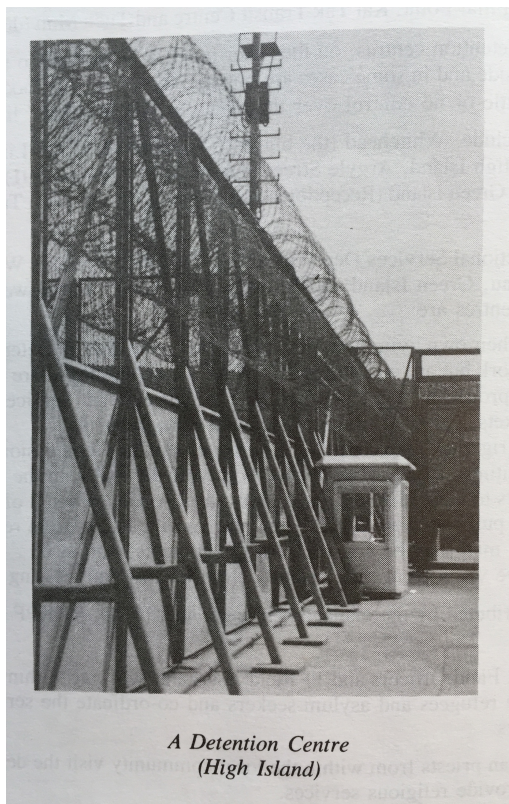
2. The backlog of VBP in HK, over a long period of time, was created during periods when less resettlement opportunities were being offered by other countries. By the same token, the durable solution that enabled HK to resolve this long-drawn and complicated crisis was, ultimately, the outcome of full cooperation and commitment from the international community. These included: Vietnam agreeing to the Orderly Departure Program (ODP) that allowed Vietnamese to leave the Vietnam legally; resettlement countries finally accepting more refugees from HK; the Comprehensive Plan of Action (CPA) creating the platform for repatriation of refugees; and the international community contributing toward improving the economy and infrastructures in Vietnam, which essentially reduced the number of Vietnamese leaving the country for economic reasons and allowed returnees to establish their lives back in country of origin.
  
3. The **human deterrence measures** initiated by the British HK Government **did not work**. They only had a short-term effect, but in the long run had an adverse impact. The two specific examples were the 'closed camp' policy introduced in July 1982, and the 'screening policy' introduced in June 1988. At the time the 'closed-camp' policy was introduced, the VBP population in HK was about 20,000. This new policy saw a small reduction in the number of arrivals for a few years until 1988, when the number of VBP arrivals took a big leap by more than 18,000. This sudden



increase prompted the 'screening policy' to be applied to all new arrivals, who were subsequently kept in detention centres pending repatriation. However, this policy proved insufficient to stop a second influx of VBP. More than 34,000 VBP arrived during 1989. Their arrival demanded a large increase in financial costs associated mainly with building detention centres and to accommodate the greater numbers of VBP. However, this was not the only issue, the greater challenge for the authorities was managing the change in detention centre dynamics. In opposition to the 'screening policy' and repatriation, thousands of VBP resorted to staging riots and hunger strikes at various detention centres.

4. There should be a **greater awareness of group dynamics**, as many of the problems inside detention centres were ignited by the different backgrounds of the detainees. Initially, camps management was not aware of the conflicts between North and South Vietnamese and ethnic Chinese Vietnamese. Since South Vietnam fell into the hands of the communist from North Vietnam, and many South Vietnamese had to leave the country to escape persecutions, some animosity between the two groups was inevitable. In February 1992, after a fatal attack in Shek Kong Detention Centre that left 24 Vietnamese burnt to death, the Government had to separate the detainees and established detention centres for just South Vietnamese or North Vietnamese. However, that did not solve the problem entirely. Soon the Government discovered that there could even be problems within the North Vietnamese population in a detention centre who came from different provinces, as fights would sometime also erupt between them as well.

5. The **psychological and social impact of living in detention centres** is long-lasting and quite complex. Most Vietnamese detention centres in HK housed elderly, men, women, children, newborn babies and physically and mentally disabled. They were surrounded by high security fence and barbed wires (see photo 4.3). Families were assigned a bunk in a sleeping space with hardly any privacy. With very little to do, the detainees walked around aimlessly or sat idle all day. Some of them stayed in this untenable situation for up to seven years.



**Photo 4.3. High Island Detention Centre**  
**Source: The Refugee Concern HK (RCHK) Directory**

Many Vietnamese detainees spoke of the prison-like condition in the centres, except that they felt that they were worse-off than prisoners because they did not know how long their stay would be since there was no sentence to be served. Some expressed feelings of shame at having left their country only to end up in detention on an isolated island with little prospect of a bright future.

The identification system and the change of nomenclature imposed on the Vietnamese also had an enormous impact on VBP's sense of self, identity and belonging. This loss of a sense of identity was increased by the ID number the Vietnamese were given upon arrival for dealing with the camp management or other authorities. Individuals were referred to by their ID number instead of their name. Furthermore, throughout the history of VBP in HK, depending on the time of their arrival, VBP were labelled 'Vietnamese refugee', 'Vietnamese asylum seeker', 'Vietnamese boat people', 'Vietnamese migrant', 'illegal immigrant', and 'economic immigrant'. Labelling the VBP not only developed hard feelings but also created distance between the Vietnamese and the management teams as they did not feel they belonged.

Crises with refugees and asylum seekers continue. According to the UN Refugee Agency, in 2016 there were 65.6 million forcibly displaced persons "worldwide as a result of persecution, conflict, violence, or human rights violations" (UNHCR, 2017, p. 2). More than 50 per cent of them came from Syria, Colombia, Afghanistan and South Sudan but also from Iraq, Yemen, Burundi, Central African Republic, Congo and Sudan (UNHCR, 2017). In 2017, the Rohingya crisis reached its peak (Amnesty International, 2017). Germany was the nation, which received the largest number of asylum claims – 722,400, whilst Turkey hosted the largest number of refugees – 2.9 million (UNHCR, 2017). Despite being only a low middle-income country Bangladesh received and hosted 400,000 refugee Rohingya people (Amnesty International, 2017). Such human displacement crises are also likely to continue in the future fuelled by war and conflict but also triggered by climate change, water scarcity and further environmental degradation.

Many refugees, asylum seekers or displaced persons undertake their journeys to the new destination by boat becoming “boat people”. Some of them arrived in Australia, but since 2014 there has been a by-partisan agreement to use detention and deterrence-based policies towards the “boat people” who have been labelled as “queue jumpers” (Walden, 2016). While public opinion in Australia is divided over the Australia Government’s stance, the international community heavily criticises Australia for its treatment of asylum seekers.

The lessons from the analysis of the VBP crisis show that a joint effort by the international community is most needed to prevent and resolve any points of war, conflict and prosecution. On the other hand, deterrence can only be a short-term measure, while detention is least suited as a policy as it creates long-lasting negative psychological and social impacts unfavourably affecting the group dynamics of the refugees and other displaced persons. The Both Sides of the Fence theory requires tackling four major aspects of such crises – rescuing, survival, cultural differences and international responsibility in order to facilitate such big population movements and deliver decent opportunities for the displaced people as well as support the work of all those involved in making this happen.

This PhD thesis created a depository for the voices, from both sides of the detention fence, of the VBP and their stories to be heard and seen. By contrast, the voices from both sides of the fence for the current “boat people” in Australia and millions of other refugees remain silenced.

## 4.6 Conclusion

This research examined the two groups of people from ‘both sides of the fence’ that were the integral part of this narrative. The results show that while dealing with the predicament of the VBP influx, the British HK Government was under the scrutiny of their handling of the crisis. Human rights organizations sharply criticized the screening process as well as the treatments and detention conditions of asylum seekers. Other countries strongly detested forcibly repatriation of VBP. Moreover, the people of HK disliked the spending of billions of taxpayer dollars on VBP and the fact that Vietnamese asylum seekers could stay in HK while their relatives who entered HK illegally were immediately returned to Mainland China.

Meanwhile, the VBP in HK were also faced with an agonizing dilemma and it seemed there was no favourable choice. The plight of the VBP began even before they arrived in HK, and to many of them, their suffering lasted as long as ten years before they managed to leave HK to resettle in another country or return to Vietnam. The moment they landed, the VBP were vulnerable, both psychologically and physically. They were crammed into squalid and prison-like camps, hot aluminium-made buildings surrounded by barbwire; confined to a three-tiered bunk bed – three adults per bunk; without privacy; lack of communications with anyone outside of the camps; with nothing to do with their time; and constantly fear of being repatriated to Vietnam and bullied by the gangs in the camps. Many VBP experienced psychological problems, including anxiety, despair, restlessness, insecurity and aggression.

All VBP whom I interviewed revealed that their experience living in HK varied from calm to chaos and hardship. Even though it was very challenging living in the camps

and their biggest fear was to return to Vietnam, they appreciate the HK Government for having accepted them and for not pushing any VBP to sea to face additional and often life-threatening dangers.

As for the Government departments and NGOs which administered the VBP in HK, the common theme running through the interviews was that handling this crisis was one the most challenging parts of their careers. Most felt that they had learnt a lot from the experience and also assessed their responses as having excelled professionally. This was despite the situation being extremely complex and draining. They noted, on reflection that they felt everyone had done their best under the trying circumstances. However, the common factor that they were all most proud of was that they had accomplished processing of the entire crisis without sending anyone away.

I began this research determined to examine the subject as a whole instead of focusing, as earlier researchers had done, only on particular themes or issues. To enable this process, I located my data analysis within a Grounded Theory (Glaser & Corbin 1990) approach, which, being iterative and comparative, demands a steady movement between concept and data, across the various types of evidence to control the conceptual level and scope of the emerging understanding. Furthermore, I started my study on the history of the VBP in HK without any preconceived theory in mind, grounded theory allowed me to develop my own perspective by letting the history unfold and create a model which helps explain the situation.

From the data I have gathered, a distinctive theory emerged. Given the complexity of the long-drawn situation, from lacking space to accommodate the VBP to public

scrutiny (internationally and domestically) to constant protests to financial cost, the HK Government was able to maintain their key role as ‘first-port of asylum’. They gave temporary refuge to every Vietnamese boat person who arrived on their shore. Under the circumstances, the HK Government had handled the crisis of the VBP the best they could. While the VBP were adapting to survive in harsh conditions and cultural differences needed to be overcome, the most important outcome of this theory, and also my very explicit activist standpoint, is: when a refugee problem of this enormity emerged, it becomes an international responsibility. A single country cannot possibly solve it on its own. The HK Government needed financial support as well as other vital assistance from the UNHCR, such as liaising with countries to resettle Vietnamese refugees, training Immigration officers on specifics about Vietnam and the people and providing them with guidelines to establish the refugee status for the VBP. They needed other countries to resettle the Vietnamese refugees, so they can leave HK. In order for the repatriation schemes to happen they also needed cooperation from the Vietnamese Government, cash incentive for VBP to return to Vietnam voluntarily offered by the UNHCR, and a program initiated by the European Community to improve the quality of life of returnees.

Overall, the Vietnamese boat people ‘dilemma’ in HK is best summarized by Clinton Leeks, former British HK Government Security Bureau official, who believes that not much could have been done differently. He said: “The difficulty was being accountable for a problem HK had little control over. HK did not control the numbers of people coming from Vietnam and they could not force other countries to help” (Carvalho, SCMP, 14 September 2015). However, Leeks concluded: “The VBP crisis is a testament to HK people’s essential resilience and tolerance. HK showed the world that

these huge migrations can be handled humanely” (Carvalho, SCMP, 14 September 2015).

Concurrent with Chan’s (2013) view, I think that it is crucial for future study to focus on the 67,000 VBP who had repatriated to Vietnam from HK and those VBP who were forced to return to Vietnam from other first port of asylum in South East Asia. Little was known about their fate after they returned and how they reintegrated in the country that had once left. Evidently, there is the lack of voices from this particular group of returned asylum seekers and this could be a further research direction. Similarly, each refugee crisis requires thorough investigation and interpretation of the factors, which caused it, conditions under which it unfolded and possible solutions. The important point of this PhD thesis is that what should be above all policies and economic measures is the human aspect of the story. Not denying anybody the right to safety and protection is the united voice from both sides of the fence.



## **Appendix 1 : Chronology of the Events**

### **1975: First group of VBP in HK**

On 4 May 1975, the Danish container ship, the *Clara Maersk* brought 3,743 VBP to HK. These VBP had escaped from Saigon on a small ocean vessel, the *Truong Xuan*. They were suffering from extreme overcrowding and shortage of food and water, and their vessel was sinking 100 miles from Saigon when the *Clara Maersk* came to their rescue in South China Seas (Chang et al., 2003, p. 4).

Upon receiving the call for help from the *Clara Maersk* from 200 miles outside of HK, the Royal Navy *HMS Chichester* was dispatched on an emergency support mission, carrying 150 tonnes of water, 4 tonnes of rations and 3 tonnes of food. Helicopters were also sent to airlift those in need of immediate medical attention (see photo A.1) (Law, 2014, p. 20).

After the *Clara Maersk* was escorted to the Kwai Chug Container Port, emergency arrangements were organised by officers of many government departments as well as members of the Civil Aid Services, the Auxiliary Medical Service and many units of the British Armed Forces to receive the VBP throughout the night (see photo A.2). The immigration officers documented the VBP; they were given medical examination, food and clothing, and were transported to three camps set up by the Army.



**Photo A.1. Deliver food supply to the *Clara Maersk*. Source: HK GIS**



**Photo A.2. Preparing emergency support for the VBP on the *Clara Maersk*  
Source: HK GIS**

Civil Aid Services were responsible for the administration of the camps; the Social Welfare Department supplied food and clothing. Every day, the Government emergency kitchen provided up to 10,000 meals plus infant feeds to the VBP. Auxiliary nurses ran milk kitchens in each of the refugee camps. Many voluntary agencies and religious organisations also catered for their needs and comfort, especially the Christians of HK (Report of the Year, 1976, pp. 100, 117, 154).

The UNHCR provided a substantial grant towards the cost of caring for the VBP and sent representatives to HK to help with their resettlements. Through the joined efforts of the Immigration Department, the Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration (ICEM) and the authorities of receiving countries, most of these VBP found a new home in United States, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Britain, Canada, Denmark, France, HK, and United States. The United States accepted 2,500 of them; HK also granted resettlement to more than 110. By the end of the year, less than 100 VBP remained to be resettled.

Over six months, the British HK Government spent more than HK\$3.5 million to provide for the VBP while they were waiting for resettlement (Report of the Year, 1976, pp. 4-5, 117). By May 1976, all of the VBP, rescued by the *Clara Maersk* in the previous year had been resettled.

### **1976: Illegal Vietnamese immigrants**

Refugees from Vietnam continued to arrive in HK during 1975/76. In fact, during that year, merchant ships had rescued 165 VBP at sea in six separate groups and brought them to HK. Moreover, another 26 VBP arrived directly from Vietnam in small boats.

The UNHCR accepted responsibility for all these VBP throughout their HK sojourn. By the end of 1976, 100 of them had left for resettlement in the United States (*Report of the Year, 1977*, p. 135).

In addition to the Vietnamese who came to HK by boat, there were immigrants from Vietnam who had been living in HK illegally. They arrived by air, sea or land. When required to register for identity cards, this group of illegal immigrants surfaced, which led to a sudden increase in applications for the entry of dependants from Vietnam. According to the 1977 *Report of the Year* (pp. 135-136), during 1976, the Government received 8,493 applications, of which 5,200 were granted permit to stay in HK.

### **1977: Family re-unifications**

The British HK Government was presented with a new situation relating to the HK residents and their dependants in Vietnam. A special unit was established to handle family re-unifications. Throughout the year, 34,000 applications to enter the territory were lodged. Those with close links with HK, such as spouses or parents and children were given higher priority. The task was costly and complicated. One of the challenges that the unit had to deal with was the forgery of Vietnamese documents. Another one was transportation. Due to suspension of scheduled air services between HK and Vietnam, the Immigration Department had to charter 22 flights from Saigon to transport 200 HK residents and 3,242 dependants (*Hong Kong, 1978*, p. 135).

Meanwhile, about 1,000 VBP arrived in HK by the end of the year. Of them, 567 were rescued at sea by ocean-going vessels and 434 arrived in small crafts (*Hong Kong, 1978*, p. 135). The UNHCR continued to look after the VBP during their stay, and

together with the Inter-Governmental Committee for European Migration, arranged for their resettlement overseas.

### **1978: Illegal traffic in human cargo, and Ex-China Vietnamese Illegal Immigrants**

The number of VBP who arrived in HK sharply increased in 1978 to nearly 6,000. In addition to the 2,441 VBP who came directly in small crafts, ocean-going vessels rescued and brought 3,356 VBP to HK (Hong Kong, 1979, p. 143).

There were rumours that the Government of Vietnam, for huge profits, was involved in shipping syndicates to secretly embark people from Vietnam on old cargo ships and dump them on neighbouring countries (Hong Kong, 1980, p. 4). On 19 December, the rumours were proven to be true when the Marine Department received a radio message from the captain of a cargo ship, the *Huey Fong*, stating that they had picked up thousands of refugees from boats sinking off the coast of Vietnam, and intended to bring them to HK, although the ship's projected first port of call was Taiwan (Hong Kong, 1980, p. 4).

Don Lao, one of the passengers on-board the *Huey Fong*, recounted his journey – firstly, he and his wife each had paid 12 tales of gold to Vietnamese local officers who organised departure for ethnic Chinese and then they waited for several months for notification to leave. Lao reveals that when they arrived at the port of Vung Tau in Vietnam, the vessel was fully loaded with cargo they had picked up from Bangkok for delivery to Taiwan. It took three days to board all passengers, and they finally left Vietnam on 13 December (Lao, 2013, pp. 101-102).

Four days after the call, on 23 December, the *Huey Fong* freighter dropped anchor at the entrance of HK waters, off Po Toi Island, with 3,318 refugees on board. Emergency relief organisations, medical staff, police, helicopter crews and volunteers were called to work over Christmas and through the New Year. Medicine, food and water were airlifted to the Vietnamese on board. However, the refugees were not allowed to disembark (Chang, et al., 2003, pp. 4-5).

In addition to the Vietnamese refugees arriving by sea, the British HK authorities also had to deal with Ex-China Vietnamese Illegal Immigrants (ECVII), who had crossed the Vietnamese border to South China and later entered HK illegally by boat. They were immediately returned to China.

The Immigration Department continued to bring residents of HK and dependants from Vietnam to HK. Thirty-one flights were chartered to carry another 4,619 over (Hong Kong, 1979, p. 143). At the end of the year, 3,561 VBP were still in HK awaiting resettlement (Hong Kong, 1979, p. 143).

### **1979: First influx of VBP**

This was the year of 'boat people'. A flood of some 200,000 VBP arrived in countries in Southeast Asia and HK. A significant contributing factor to this sudden influx was the cleansing of ethnic Chinese from all over Vietnam by the communist regime. The influx of VBP was the one thing that the Government and the people of HK did not prepare for, nor did they see it coming. The total number of VBP who arrived in HK during 1979 was more than 68,700. Of them, 66,405 VBP arrived during the first seven months of the year. This figure was added to HK's five per cent population

growth rate in 1979, while their expected growth rate was two per cent (Hong Kong, 1980, p. 46; Cartmail, 1983, p. 195; Chang, et al., 2003, pp. 4).

One of the Government's largest financial commitments was expenditure on public works, including port and airport; provision of roads, sewers, bridges, and tunnels; supply and distribution of water and the construction of public buildings. However, because of the ever-increasing cost of construction and the additional unexpected workloads related to the influx of VBP, the planned Public Works Programs could not be implemented (Hong Kong, 1980, p. 140).

Dianne Wood (1980), from the Government Information Services stated:

1979 was a year overshadowed by one relentless problem: the Vietnamese refugees, or boat people. The influx of these refugees, together with large-scale immigration from China, raised real fears that a decade of economic and social achievement might be undermined, communal stability impaired, and plans for further progress thrown out of gear (Hong Kong, 1980, p. 1).

On 19 January, the *Huey Fong* entered the harbour without permission. The British HK Government was forced to let the refugees leave the freighter. The last of this group of refugees disembarked the *Huey Fong* on 23 January (Lao, 2013, p. 108).

Subsequently, 3,500 taels of gold equivalent to HK\$6.5 million were found in the engine-room of *Huey Fong*, and six months later, the captain and 10 other people, including three HK-based businessmen with connections in Vietnam were arrested and charged with conspiracy. Their prison sentences totalled more than 50 years. During

the trial, it was revealed that the refugees on board had been embarked in Vietnamese waters with the assistance of the local authorities (Hong Kong, 1980, p. 4).

During the month of January, while in the midst of dealing with over 3,000 refugees aboard the *Huey Fong*, more than 2,000 VBP also reached HK in small, unseaworthy boats. These VBP arrived daily, right in the heart of the city. The Government Dockyard in Canton Road, used as the refugees' transit centre, was positioned in one of the most crowded districts of Kowloon, here thousands of apprehensive residents observed these refugee numbers with growing concern.

On 7 February, another freighter, the 3600-ton *Skyluck* (see photo A.3), entered HK waters without authorisation. It had 2,651 Vietnamese on board. This ship was escorted to an anchorage off Lamma Island. Its passengers were not allowed to disembark. However, food, water and medicines were delivered to them daily (Report of the Year, 1980, p. 5). For five months, the passengers on the *Skyluck* held several hunger strikes, conducted a mass protest swim, sent pleading letters to HK authorities, and displayed signs begging for help. On 29 June, the drama ended when the *Skyluck* deliberately cut its anchor and the ship drifted onto to Lama Island (see photo A.4). All Vietnamese on board were picked up and sent to various refugee camps (Law, 2014, p. 28).





Photo A.3. The *Skyluck*. Source: HK Government Information Services (GIS)



Photo A.4. The *Skyluck* on Lama Island. Source: HK GIS

Similar to the *Huey Fong*, the *Skyluck* was carrying large paper rolls and was designed to accommodate 650 people to work on the ship and handle the cargo. However, it managed to pick up nearly 2,700 passengers from Vietnam. After more than a week, they reached a desert island near the Philippines. At night, the captain and crew tried to transfer their passengers to shore on small boats. By the morning, they were chased away by the Philippines Coast Guards. *Skyluck* took off and headed to HK. When they reached HK, it was 21 days after they left Vietnam. Mai Tran, one of the passengers recalled:

“We rode and sat on large spools of stacked newsprint rolls. This was our home for the next six months – where we ate, slept, and socialized. Lavatory facilities didn’t exist. Human waste disposal was ‘handled’ by using the ship’s on-board crane that suspended a netted rope basket with a board on the bottom for people to walk out and stand on” (Martinez, 2009, p. 32).

While the reception areas on land were ‘crammed to bursting point’ (Hong Kong, 1980, p. 5) with the flood of refugees, small boats kept coming every day. On 30 March, 849 VBP landed from seven boats, all on the point of sinking (Hong Kong, 1980, p. 5).

On 15 April, the *Ha Long*, a 35-metre vessel forced its way into HK harbour. It was carrying 573 refugees, including 230 children under the deck, all crammed together like sardines (see photo A.5). Although, authorities suspected that this was one of many ‘human cargo syndicate’ operations, the refugees were nonetheless quickly taken ashore due to their poor condition (Law, 2014, p. 29).



**Photo A.5. The *Ha Long*. Source: HK GIS**

Regardless of how strenuous the situation was, the Government maintained a humanitarian philosophy. In April, the Secretary for Security, Mr Lewis Davies, declared: 'I do not believe it would be right, or to HK's credit, to send to sea a heavily overload ship, thus committing people to the deep, on the basis that they can take their chance somewhere else' (Hong Kong, 1980, p. 6).

On 22 May, the British ship, *Sibonga*, brought another 1,004 VBP to HK whom they had rescued from two sinking boats about 100 miles south of Vietnam. The British Government also accepted this group of refugees (Hong Kong, 1980, p. 6).

Five days later, a Panamanian-registered freighter *Sen On* deliberately ran aground on Lantau Island. On board were 1,430 Vietnamese refugees, more than double its legal carrying capacity (Law, 2014, p. 29). Law's research revealed that the captain and

eleven crewmembers of this vessel had abandoned the ship and left the area on a small fishing boat near Pearl Harbour.

In addition to the huge increase in number of new arrivals, the VBP situation in HK in 1979 intensified for a number of reasons. Apart from handling a huge number of boat people arriving from Vietnam at the rate of more than 600 per day, the illegal immigration arriving from China also increased significantly. In the months of May and June, these numbers swelled to 14,430 and 11,884 respectively. Moreover, it was estimated that 'for every person detained about three made their way undetected to the urban areas' (Hong Kong, 1980, pp. 5, 116).

While the numbers of newly arrivals continue to rise, in contrast, the rate of resettlements was out of proportion compared to the rate of arrivals. On one 'black day' in mid-May, more than 1,700 VBP landed, whereas only one person left for resettlement. The British HK Government claimed that in mid-year, while they were receiving about 35 per cent of the boat people landed on the South East Asian shores, they had only received resettlement places for 12 per cent. For example, the monthly rate of resettlements for Malaysia during that time was 3,000 verses 600 for HK. The crisis increased in severity in May and June. Government records show over the two months, that the total arrivals were 38,339 compared to total departures of only 2,108. This grave problem prompted the then British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, to initiate an international conference to find solutions (Hong Kong, 1980, pp. 5-6).

In June, the Governor of HK visited London, New York, Washington and Geneva to draw international attention to the dire situation of VBP fleeing Vietnam. On 13 June,

in London, he said: “The number of people coming out of Vietnam is straining the humanity of countries nearby to breaking point” and that “desperate people do desperate things” (Hong Kong, 1980, p. 6). Upon returning to HK on 23 July, from the 1979 Geneva Conference on Indo-Chinese Refugees, the Governor described the results as a “major achievement by the civilised world”, and he hoped that by October about 7,000 people would leave and that a monthly departure rate of 4,000 would be established. Between July and October, the number of VBP arrived and departed fluctuated, however, it did reflect a total reduction of more than 3,000. When the Conference began, the population of VBP in HK was 66,038 and on 31 October the figure was 62,809 (Hong Kong, 1980, p. 9).

After being checked at the Western Quarantine Anchorage, VBP moved through the harbour to the Government Dockyard, in their small boats, and then tied up there while waiting for two to three weeks before being transferred (see photo A.6 and A.7). Facilities where the VBP were transferred to were open-centres such as military camps or factory buildings fitted out with tiered bunk-beds. Of necessity, the dockyard was turned into a ‘closed’ centre, which the refugees could not leave until medical examinations, inoculations, initial processing and listing by immigration staff were completed. There were periods in the middle of the year when the dockyard held more than 12,000 people (Hong Kong, 1980, p. 7).



**Photo A.6. The Government Dockyard mid-1979 (A). Source: HK GIS**



**Photo A.7. The Government Dockyard mid-1979 (B). Source: HK GIS**

The British HK Government acted in close liaison with the UNHCR, to search for all available reception areas and facilities to host the VBP. While camps were being set up from scratch, other sites had to be found quickly for future arrivals. Frequently, the

pressure rose to intolerable levels. On June 1, for example, there were 5,623 refugees still on their boats at the Western Quarantine Anchorage. Five days later, an improvised anchorage at Discovery Bay on Lantau Island held boats with 8,363 people on board, for whom food and water had to be supplied. At this time, the staff of the Social Welfare Department's emergency kitchen were producing more than 40,000 hot meals, plus 54,000 dry rations and many other essentials per day for the VBP (Hong Kong, 1980, p. 114; *The Boat Refugees from Vietnam: Impact on Hong Kong*, 1980, p. 7).

Later in the year, fifteen camps were set up to accommodate the VBP. Four of these camps were under the control of the UNHCR and were managed by members of charitable relief organisations such as the Red Cross, Caritas, the HK Christian Service and the International Rescue Committee. The British HK Government ran the remaining camps (Law, 2014, p. 30; Hong Kong, 1980, pp. 7-8).

While the UNHCR staff and representatives of the potential host countries were processing and listing of the VBP for resettlement in Western countries, the Government and UNHCR recognized that a large portion of the VBP could be staying in HK for an extensive period. Thus, the refugees were encouraged to find work so they could be active and 'at least partially self-supporting, rather than to be idle and prone to the apathy and hopelessness, which a long wait can generate' (Hong Kong, 1980, p. 8).

Although allowing the VBP to seek employments while waiting resettlement was a good solution to their morals and enabled them to partially support themselves, Suk-

mun Law (2014) claimed that this movement—presented some problems in the community. These included social tensions between Vietnamese and locals, and local workers feeling threaten by the cheaper labour that VBP provided (pp. 32-33).

The year 1979 was especially significant for many government departments across HK. Many organisations, such as the Royal HK Police, Marine Police, Royal Navy, and Army had all worked under great pressure to cope with the influx of Vietnamese refugees, illegal immigrants from China and human trafficking by ocean-going freighters (Hong Kong, 1980, pp. 118-120). The influx of VBP had strained the workforce and stretched the resources from all government branches, departments and agencies to the limit. For example, every day, an average of 800 volunteers were called in to support the regular forces. Many of these volunteers joined in to help after they finished their normal job (Hong Kong, 1980, pp. 7, 124).

In fact, according to the Government's annual report for the Prisons Department, 1979 was the busiest year in their history. In the beginning of the year, 50 prison officers were assigned to receive Vietnamese refugees from the *Huey Fong* into the Kai Tak camp. Then another 70 officers were transferred to administer the Government Dockyard, Ma Tau Wai and Argyle Street camps. At the highest point of the VBP influx, apart from their average daily penal population of 6,108, an addition of 11,000 VBP and 4,500 people who claimed to be Vietnamese refugees were also under the Prison's care. For much of the year, the Department's oldest prison, Victoria in Central District and three minimum-security prisons, Chi Ma Wan, Pik Uk and Tong Fuk were all used to accommodate and process VBP.



Furthermore, due to the financial restraints the influx imposed on the British HK Government, two vital projects that the Prison Department had planned for the year 1979, had to be cancelled. These included the extension to the Staff Training Institute and the other was the construction of a maximum-security prison on Lantau Island (Hong Kong, 1980, pp. 128-129).

The VBP influx also affected the Government Information Services (GIS), which provides information and communications between the Government and the people. One of GIS's major tasks during the year 1979 was to establish worldwide awareness of the influx of refugees from Vietnam and illegal immigrants from China that the British HK Government was dealing with. The daily number of inquiries to the GIS from the media increased 62 per cent compared to the previous year. They now totalled an average of 627 calls per day. Furthermore, in August, while in the midst of handling the VBP crisis, typhoon *Hope* hit HK. The Division's staff spent about 1,500 working hours on emergency duty to keep the public informed about the development of the typhoon (Hong Kong, 1980, p. 167).

Members of the Civil Aid Services played a vital role in the daily management of refugee camps and in the delivery of food supplies to refugees awaiting clearance in quarantine anchorages. Up to 150 members of the service were involved each day in these tasks (Hong Kong, 1980, p. 174).

In addition, the Auxiliary Medical Service provided a variety of medical and health services to the VBP. An ambulance service was established for sick refugees awaiting

clearance on board the vessels in which they had arrived and for those in refugee camps throughout HK (Hong Kong, 1980, p. 174).

During this year, inmates at the Tai Lam Drug Addiction Treatment Centre also carried out projects related to VBP, including the construction of 1,156 triple-tier bunks for the refugees, and assisted the security forces in the New Territories with the clearance of 20 kilometres of underground and the construction of a 17.5 kilometre concertina barbed wire fence. Similarly, inmates at the Hei Ling Chau addiction treatment centre also built 1,360 double bunks and 390 triple-tier bunks for VBP (Hong Kong, 1980, pp. 130-131).

At the last quarter of the year, HK saw a huge influx of illegal immigrants from China across the land border and by sea. From October to December Security forces detained and repatriated 35,797 illegal immigrants, an average of 11,932 per month. It was also anticipated that for 10 people caught, about 18 got through (*The Boat Refugees from Vietnam: Impact on Hong Kong*, 1980, pp. 9-10).

For the year 1979, while the UNHCR accepted the financial burden for the care and maintenance of all VBP in HK, the direct cost to the Government of goods, services and facilities provided for refugees was about HK\$72 million, not counting indirect cost and value of land used (Hong Kong, 1980, p. 11; Law, 2014, p. 32). On the last day of 1979, there were 55,705 VBP in HK camps awaiting resettlement (Hong Kong, 1980, p. 1).

## **1980: Increased in the number of ECVII**

During 1980, an addition of about 6,700 VBP and 4,470 ECVII had arrived in HK (Hong Kong, 1981, p. 148). The number of existing and new arrival of VBP continued to strain the Medical and Health Department's resources. Preventing the importation of diseases from the refugees and the spread of communicable diseases among the refugees and to the general population was the Department's higher priority. A clinic was set up in the Canton Road Reception Centre to provide chest X-ray examinations and health screenings on all new arrivals. In addition, immunisation campaigns and health education programmes were conducted in all refugee camps (Hong Kong, 1981, p. 89).

Throughout the year, 37,468 VBP were resettled overseas, mostly in the United States of America, Canada and the United Kingdom. Many countries, including Australia, France and Germany also helped with resettlement of refugees. Some countries have made a point of accepting physically, mentally or socially handicapped refugees (Hong Kong, 1981, p. 147).

As the year was ending, while there were more than 24,000 VBP awaiting resettlement, there were signs that some of the quotas, once filled, would not be renewed. Furthermore, the resettlement countries began to adopt more restrictive criteria (Hong Kong, 1981, p. 13). By the end of the year, more than 6,400 ECVII were returned to China and another 2,388 were awaiting repatriation (Hong Kong, 1981, p. 147).

## **1981: VBP refused offers of resettlement**

A sudden increase in the number of VBP who arrived in HK in small boats, via Vietnam or Macau prompted considerable concern for the Government, in particular, the 1,500 VBP arrivals over a 3-day period in June. The total number of arrivals in 1981 was 11,886 (Hong Kong, 1982, p. 139).

There were indications that VBP were refusing offers of resettlement in order that they could choose where to go. Such a development was detrimental to the resettlement programme and reduced the opportunity of resettlement overseas. Consequently, in May the British HK Government introduced a new measure, which would ban VBP from working in HK if they refused an offer of resettlement (Chan, 2012).

There were more than 16,200 VBP in HK at the end of the year. The British HK Government continued to seek international attention in order to ensure that the international community maintained a resettlement effort (Hong Kong, 1982, pp. 153-154).

## **1982: ‘Closed centre’ policy, and riots in refugee camps**

The year 1982 marked the beginning of several significant changes in the policy toward the VBP. It was evident that the numbers of VBP arriving were greater than those leaving, at the ratio of four to one. While Vietnamese people continued to come and seek asylum in HK, the resettlement countries were more reluctant to accept refugees. Some countries accepted refugees only for family reunion purpose, or because they had been rescued at sea by a ship bearing that country’s flag (Hong Kong, 1983, pp. 158-159).

Among the new arrivals, the majority were from North Vietnam. It appeared that they came to HK for economic reason rather than escaping racial or political persecution like those from the South, which made it difficult for them to seek resettlement overseas. This major concern prompted HK's first 'humane deterrence' policy toward VBP. On 2 July 1982, the British HK Government implemented the 'closed centre' policy, designed to discourage Vietnamese people from coming to HK. All Vietnamese who arrived or were born after that date would be detained in closed-centres, located in the remote parts of the territory. Moreover, they were to be placed under strict confinement and made subject to regulation and control. No outside employment was allowed and there was little contact with the public (Hong Kong, 1983, p. 158). The Government was hoping that the realities of the 'closed centre' policy would discourage those considering migration from Vietnam and that in 1983, HK would see a reduction in the numbers of VBP arrivals.

Despite the implementation of the 'closed centre' policy, Vietnamese people continued to arrive in HK. Throughout the year, 7,840 VBP arrived and about half of these between July and the end of the year (Hong Kong, 1983, p. 158).

Nine closed-centres were established to detain VBP who arrived after 2 July 1982. These were located at Hei Ling Chau, Chi Ma Wan, Cape Collinson and Tuen Mun. Most of those in family groups stayed at Chi Ma Wan, the largest centre, which could accommodate up to 3,500 people. Conversely single people were dispersed among the smaller centres, including the Hei Ling Chau Drug Addiction Treatment Centre and the Tai Tam Gap Correctional Institution. Those accommodated at Chi Ma Wan centre,

could also benefit from a full-time welfare programme that provided educational and recreational activities for VBP (Hong Kong, 1983, pp. 151-153).

In February the Prison Department changed its name to Correctional Services Department (CSD) to reflect its role and function more accurately. Then in July, in addition to their existing duties, the CSD was also responsible for the control and management of closed-centres for the VBP. With this new responsibility, apart from 85 uniformed staff assigned to manage the closed-centres, nearly 300 new staff were recruited and trained to supervise refugees (Hong Kong, 1983, p. 149).

Throughout the year, a number of disturbances broke out among the VBP in various camps, mostly due to cultural and political differences. It all started in February at the Kai Tak North Camp. In May, it escalated to a large-scale riot involving some 1,500 VBP and a major police operation. As a result, many VBP were arrested, and the Government had to separate and place the refugees in different accommodations (Hong Kong, 1983, pp. 139).

At the end of the year, there were more than 12,000 VBP in HK, of whom 8,869 were in open-centres and 3,747 were in closed-centres. At this time, nearly 60 per cent of the remaining VBP in HK had already spent nearly three years in the territory (Hong Kong, 1983, pp. 158).

### **1983: Decreased in the number of refugee resettlements**

The outlook for resettlement of VBP did not look promising. United States, Canada, Australia and France appeared to be the only major countries willing to resettle VBP.

The numbers of resettlement fell from 34,000 in 1980, to over 17,000 in 1981 and to less than 10,000 in 1982 (Chan, 2012).

The number of new arrivals this year did drop considerably, Melinda Parsons from the GIS advised that the 53.4 per cent reduction in the number of arrivals compared to the previous year should not be put down to any single factor. She states: 'the closed centre policy, adverse weather conditions during the peak arrival season, a lack of boats in Vietnam, the growth of the Orderly Departure Programme, and a crackdown on illegal departures by the Vietnam Government, have all played a part' (Hong Kong, 1984, p. 183).

The overall population of VBP in 1983 hardly changed. The year started with 12,631 VBP in various open and closed-centres. Throughout the year, 3,651 VBP had arrived, 4,200 had been resettled, 727 had been born and 28 had died. At the end of the year, there were 12,770 VBP in HK (Hong Kong, 1984, pp. 182-183). The cost of accommodating VBP in HK in 1983, was HK\$143 million, of which, the UNHCR contributed HK\$19 million (Hong Kong, 1984, pp. 182-183).

### **1984: Separations of northern and southern Vietnamese**

During the year, the number of VBP arriving in HK remained relatively small. The situation of Vietnamese refugees during 1984 was similar to 1983, except for several disruptions from the VBP in closed-centres. During the Lunar New in early February, disturbances broke out in both closed-centres Hei Ling Chau and Chi Ma Wan, mainly due to of the differences between the northern and southern Vietnamese. As a result, the VBP were separated. The Northerners were kept at Hei Ling Chau Closed Centre

and the Southerners were kept at Chi Ma Wan Closed Centre. Cape Collinson Correctional Institution is where most refugee families were kept (Chan, 2012; Hong Kong, 1985, pp. 226, 231). During the month of February, four cases of disturbances in closed-centres were reported, which involved 125 VBP and 972 items were seized during the weapon search (Law, 2014, p. 219).

On 2 July, VBP at the Hei Ling Chau Closed Centre staged a 4-day hunger strike to protest against the slow pace of resettlement, especially when it was evident that the rate of resettlement for northern Vietnamese was slower compared with that of southern Vietnamese. The protest ended after the local representative of the UNHCR assured the VBP that they were doing everything possible to expedite resettlement of the VBP (Hong Kong, 1985, pp. 226-227).

At the beginning of the year, the VBP population was 12,770. Throughout the year, 3,694 of them had been resettled and another 2,230 had arrived. By the end of the year, the Vietnamese refugee population was 11,896. Among them, 5,654 VBP were detained in three closed-centres and the 5,895 VBP who came to HK before the change in policy continued to stay in the two main open-centres run by the HK Red Cross and Caritas-HK. About 2,800 VBP had been living in these temporary transit centres for over five years (Hong Kong, 1985, pp. 226, 230-231). Accommodating the VBP in 1984, costed the British HK Government HK\$84 million (Hong Kong, 1985, p. 231).

### **1985: Improvement in refugee resettlements**

The year 1985 had shown some improvement in term of resettlements. In September, the British Government accepted 500 VBP in HK under the family reunion criteria.



This action had stimulated positive responses from overseas resettlement countries. The British HK Government also agreed to allow 20 VBP of ethnic Chinese origin from the open refugee centres to resettle in HK per month, with a total limit of 250 people (Chan, 2012; Hong Kong, 1986, p. 210).

At the beginning of the year, the VBP population was 11,896. Throughout the year, 1,112 arrived while 3,953 had left for overseas resettlement, and 412 babies were born (Hong Kong, 1986, pp. 209-211).

Throughout the year, two additional facilities were established to relieve overcrowding at Hei Ling Chau and Chi Ma Wan closed-centres. A former Army camp at Tuen Mun and the Prison adjacent to the Chi Ma Wan were converted as facilities to accommodate VBP (Hong Kong, 1986, p. 206). The VBP were given educational classes and recreational activities organised by the Save the Children Fund, World Relief and the Salvation Army. The UNHCR continued to subsidise the cost of food, medical supplies, utilities and relief items for the VBP (Hong Kong, 1986, p. 206). By the end of the year, the Vietnamese refugee population was 9,443. About half of them were in closed-centres and half in open-centres. More than 1,500 of them had been living in these temporary transit centres for over six years (Hong Kong, 1986, pp. 209-211). The cost of accommodating VBP in HK in 1985 was HK\$92.8 million (Hong Kong, 1986, p. 210).

### **1986: The British Government temporarily suspended resettlement of VBP, and a jump in the number of VBP arrivals**

In February, as requested by the UNHCR, the British HK Government established a Rescue at Sea Resettlement Offers Transit Centre to permit the transfer of overdue cases of refugees, rescued at sea, from other camps in the region to HK. This movement allowed time for the processing of these cases for resettled in participating countries, within the guarantee period of 90 days (Hong Kong, 1987, p. 225).

During 1986, apart from the United States, Canada and Australia, as part of the international effort to reduce the size of the refugee problem in HK, the United Kingdom accepted 425 VBP for resettlement. Other countries including the Netherlands, Norway, Finland, Sweden and New Zealand also resettled 369 VBP. The British HK Government continued to accept VBP of Chinese origin from the open-centres for local settlement each month, up to maximum of 250 (Hong Kong, 1987, p. 225). In September, the British Government decided to stop accepting VBP for resettlement in the UK pending an overall review of the whole VBP issue (Chan, 2012).

Since the introduction of the 'closed centre' policy in 1982, the numbers of VBP continued to drop until 1986 when the scenario was reversed. Compared to the previous year, the number of VBP arrivals in 1986 increased by 53 per cent. Throughout the year 2,087 had arrived, 327 babies were born, and 3,816 were resettled (Hong Kong, 1987, p. 224). By the end of the year, the Vietnamese refugee population was 8,039, with, 4,527 VBP in closed-centres and 3,512 in open-centres. Nearly a hundred of these had been in HK centres for more than seven years (Hong Kong, 1987, p. 224).

Accommodating the VBP in HK in 1986 cost the Government HK\$118 million, of which HK\$106 million was spent on closed-centres and HK\$12 million on open-centres. The UNHCR contributed HK\$35 million towards the care and maintenance of all the refugees. They had also started to fund the education and language training programmes for the refugees (Hong Kong, 1987, p. 225).

### **1987: Influx of ECVII, and a big drop in the number of refugee resettlements**

In July 1987, a false rumour spread in Guangdong province that an amnesty for refugees was in the offering in HK and that they would be quickly resettled in Western countries, which prompted a sudden increase of the ECVII. Between July and August 7,306 ECVII arrived in HK illegally. This upsurge placed more demand on the Government's resources. Three new detention centres were set up to accommodate them. A delegation of HK officials travelled to China to discuss with Chinese officials the situation of these illegal immigrants. As a result, a joint statement was made, and the Chinese authorities announced that urgent measures would be taken to deter ECVII from attempting to enter HK. By the end of the year, almost all of them had been returned to China (Hong Kong, 1988, pp. 215-228).

The number of VBP arriving in HK continued to rise while the number of VBP leaving HK for overseas resettlement dropped nearly 50 per cent compared to the previous year. It was argued that the main reason for the decline was that most of the VBP now arriving in HK were economic migrants from North Vietnam rather than refugees fleeing from persecution. Another reason appeared to be the UK's unwillingness to take the lead in resettling refugees, especially since the British Government stopped

its intake of VBP since September the previous year to review the situation and no decision had been made on this issue.

The UNHCR considered that the British Government's failure to take refugees from HK was severely hindering its efforts to secure resettlement places on HK's behalf. At the Annual Executive Committee Meeting of the UNHCR in Geneva in October, the HK Principal Assistant Secretary, Mr Nigel French urged the international community to look urgently for an effective method of tackling the continuing arrival in HK. He stated that the situation had given rise to considerable public discontent and a growing sense of frustration in HK (Chan, 2012).

During the year, 3,395 VBP arrived, more than 2,200 were resettled and 319 births were registered. At the end of the year, the number of VBP in HK was 9,530. Of these, 6,566 were in closed-centres and 2,964 were in open-centres (Hong Kong, 1988, p. 215).

## **HK**

The year 1988 marked a record high in the number of new arrivals since 1979. Throughout the year, 18,352 VBP arrived in HK. Meanwhile, the number of VBP resettled was 2,772 (Hong Kong, 1990, p. 348).

This sudden upsurge prompted the introduction of another human deterrence measure. The British HK Government introduced a 'screening policy' for all VBP to differentiate refugees from economic migrants. All VBP arriving in HK on or after the cut-off date on 16 June 1988, were no longer automatically considered as refugees, but

as asylum seekers instead, and were immediately transferred to detention camps to await screening (Hong Kong, 1990, p. 348).

If screened-in as a refugee, the applicant was moved to a refugee camp to await resettlement. If screened-out as a non-refugee, the applicant was advised that he/she has a right to review, and was detained in detention centres pending repatriation to Vietnam. To exercise their right of review, the applicant must submit their case to the Refugee Status Review Board (RSRB) within 28 days of receiving the notice of 'status' determination (Hong Kong, 1990, p. 349).

The British HK Government propagandised the screening policy by broadcasting an announcement in Vietnamese '*bắt đầu từ nay*' on Television and Radio HK, one of the most popular radio channels in HK. The intention was to inform the boat people that they might be repatriated, and to discourage them from coming to HK. The announcement was broadcasted every day, nearly once every hour. It was also communicated to VBP in detention centres. For the people of HK, even though they did not know Vietnamese, many gradually memorised the pronunciation of the announcement that they had frequently heard on radio and television.

The announcement in Vietnamese:

Bắt đầu từ nay, một chính sách mới về thuyền nhân Việt Nam đã được chấp hành tại Hồng Kông. Từ nay về sau, những thuyền nhân Việt Nam kiếm cách nhập cảnh Hồng Kông với thân phận những người di tản vì vấn đề kinh tế sẽ bị coi là những người nhập cảnh phi pháp. Là những người nhập cảnh phi pháp, họ sẽ không có chút khả năng nào để được đi định cư tại nước thứ ba, và họ sẽ bị giam cầm để chờ ngày giải về Việt Nam.

The meaning of the announcement in English:

From now on, a new policy regarding Vietnamese boat people has been implemented in Hong Kong. Hereafter, those Vietnamese boat people seeking to immigrate into Hong Kong as immigrants due to economic reasons will be considered illegal immigrants. As illegal immigrants, they will not have the ability to settle in a third country, and they will be detained until repatriated to Vietnam.

(Chan, 2013, p. 8)

With the implementation of the new screening policy, the deterrent effect of the 1982-closed-centre policy was no longer necessary. On 16 June, the Government announced the 'liberalisation' scheme, which would be implemented in September. It was supposed to employ a more relaxed regime for the existing refugees in the closed-centres as well as for future refugees screened in by the Immigration Department. The intention was to transform the closed-centres to open-centres and place the refugees under the management of the UNHCR (Hong Kong, 1990, p. 350).

In June 1988, over 5,000 VBP staged a 3-day hunger strike at Whitehead Detention Centre (Law, 2014, p. 219). After a disturbance at Hei Ling Chau Detention Centre on 18 and 19 July, VBP accused CSD officers of being violent toward them. The Justice of Peace conducted an investigation on the allegation and the Government published a report on 6 October, which concluded that unnecessary force was being used on VBP by CSD officers (Chan, 2012). On 13 October, about 700 CSD staff rallied against the report (Law, 2014, p. 220).

Local HK people were against the construction of refugee detention centres. In August, parents signed a petition against placing VBP students in local school. In September, 23,000 locals signed a petition against the relaxing of the refugee closed-centres. On 10 October, nearly 1,000 HK citizens protested against camp liberalization in Tuen

Mun. Public surveys found between 65% and 75% of people supported the refusal of entry for VBP (Law, 2014, pp. 219-220).

On 14 September, the UK Government in HK received the first warnings from Chinese officials that the VBP situation must be resolved before the handover to China in 1997 (Law, 2014, p. 220). Later, on 2 December, the Security Branch held an emergency meeting about the 1,000 children in the San Yick Centre suffering from skin diseases (Law, 2014, p. 221).

In September 1988, the UNHCR and the British HK Government entered into an agreement, under which the Government would bear the capital costs of the construction of the refugee centres, and the UNHCR would be responsible for all costs related to medical treatment, food, transport and other services provided to the VBP (Hong Kong, 1990, p. 351).

On 16 December, a Memorandum of Understanding between Vietnam and UNHCR was drawn concerning voluntary repatriation of VBP. Vietnam had guaranteed safety and dignity for the returning Vietnamese, and freedom from persecution and discrimination. The first voluntary return was expected to take place in early 1989 (Law, 2014, p. 6).

On 23 December, a Christmas party was held at Argyle Street Detention Centre for more than 650 VBP children, supported by churches, the Rotary Club and American Women's Association. The CSD staff also organized a series of New Year

celebrations entertainment programs for VBP in detention centres and open refugee centres (Chan, 2012).

At the end of the year, over 20,000 VBP, were still in HK (Chan, 2012).

### **1989: Second influx of VBP, establishment of the Comprehensive Plan of Action, and beginning of the repatriation of VBP**

Ten years after the first largest influx of VBP into HK, another big wave arrived in the small and crowded territory. During 1989, 34,116 VBP arrived; this nearly doubled the number of the previous year, which was already the highest in any year since 1979 (Hong Kong, 1990, p. 348). This second largest VBP influx put an even greater burden on the Government and the people of HK. Having run out of accommodation for them, ferries at Stonecutters Island were called into use as temporary housing (Chan, 2012).

At this stage, there were three groups of VBP in HK. Group 1, comprising arrivals before 2 July 1982, was located in open-centres, managed by the HK Christian Aid on behalf of the UNHCR. More than 808 VBP of this group had been living in HK for more than eight years. Group 2, who arrived after 2 July 1982, was detained in closed-centres, managed by the CSD while awaiting resettlement overseas. Group 3, who had arrived after 16 June 1988, and was awaiting screening or repatriation was accommodated in detention centres, managed by CSD. The Government referred to pre-16 June 1988 arrivals as ‘Vietnamese refugees’ and post-1988 as ‘Vietnamese boat people’.



On 10 January, the British Government announced that they would provide 1,000 more places of resettlement. It was an initiative with hope that it would stimulate other countries to increase their resettlement quotas in order to reduce the VBP population in HK (Chan, 2010). On 18 January, the British HK Government made provision to allow doctors to practice within the detention centres. This would ensure that the medical services to HK people would not be disrupted. Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) was one of the charity groups to provide medical services in Vietnamese refugee centres (Chan, 2012).

Reportedly, on 15 February some VBP at Chi Ma Wan and Hei Ling Chau detention centres had refused to take part in screening interviews. Some also refused to accept the Notices of Status Determination (Chan, 2012). On 2 March, the first group of 81 VBP volunteer to repatriate, had returned to Vietnam on a chartered flight arranged by the UNHCR (Chan, 2012).

In June, at the international conference on Indo-Chinese Refugees in Geneva, the Governor of HK, Mr David Wilson said:

The strain on our resources, and on our patience and compassion, has been enormous. But we have coped. We have housed, fed and cared for all those who have come. We have turned no-one away. This is something of which we can all be proud. Many people outside HK do not seem to realise what a burden the continuing flow from Vietnam creates for us.... Those who come here do not seek a home in HK. Their goal is elsewhere, in particular, the United States. But they have little prospect of ever getting there, or anywhere else. Over 80

per cent of the Vietnamese now arriving in HK do not meet United States resettlement criteria (Hong Kong, 1990, p. 7).

At the Conference, the Comprehensive Plan of Action (CPA) for Indochinese Refugees was formulated, and the screening policy was endorsed. It was agreed in principle to the repatriation of non-refugees (Hong Kong, 1990, p. 7).

Between 16 and 21 of July, due to Typhoon Gordon, about 300 policemen and drivers, with 80 army trucks had moved 7,000 VBP to and from camps for their safety (Chan, 2012). Between 23 and 26 of July 200 VBP at Shek Kong were involved in an unrest that caused numerous injuries and 1 death. The authorities conducted an investigation into the causes and alleged maltreatment of over 100 VBP (Law, 2014, p. 221).

In August, 200 locals protested the building of a detention centre near High Island. A week later, the protest continued with the number of protesters growing to nearly 1,400 (Law, 2014, p. 221). In late August, local HK people raised their concern about the excessive use of the Prince of Wales Hospital in Shatin by VBP from Whitehead Detention Centre (Law, 2014, p. 222).

During a visit in HK on 21 August, U.S. Congressman Solarz stated that the United States opposed mandatory repatriation (Law, 2014, p. 222). On 28 August, a large-scale disturbance took place in Tai A Chau Detention Centre. Over 300 police officers were deployed throughout the day to maintain order. A number of police officers were injured during the incident (Chan, 2012).

On 2 September, a fight involving about 2,000 VBP broke out at Shek Kong. More than 350 police officers were sent to the centre. A subsequent search had found a large quantity of homemade weapons (Chan, 2012).

From 13 to 17 of October, about 10,000 VBP in 3 detention centres protested against mandatory repatriation. During the year, reportedly over 100 cases of protests and disturbance took place in most of the VBP camps, namely, Chi Ma Wan, Sham Shui Po, Tai Ah Chau, Whitehead and Shek Kong (Law, 2014, p. 222).

On 12 December, a forced Repatriation Scheme was implemented. It resulted in 51 screened-out Vietnamese non-refugees being returned to Vietnam. This prompted international outrage, and it was the only and last mandatory repatriation of VBP from HK (Hong Kong, 1991, p. 379).

In addition to the three major resettlement countries, the United States, Canada, and Australia, as part of an international effort to lessen the refugee problem in HK, the United Kingdom resettled 194 VBP, and HK itself had agreed to accept 250 Vietnamese refugees of Chinese origin to settle locally. However, only 121 accepted this offer (Hong Kong, 1990, p. 351).

The number of VBP willing to volunteer was very small. Over a year there were, in fact, only 264 actually returning to Vietnam (Hong Kong, 1991, p. 379). The British HK Government invested a great deal of energy into encouraging Vietnamese people to return home voluntarily. On 8 September, the Government introduced additional measures to facilitate the voluntary repatriation of VBP to Vietnam. As soon as the

VBP informed the camp management that they were willing to go back to Vietnam, they were transferred to separate accommodation within the detention centre, often on the same day, before being transported to Lowu holding centre. This was to prevent the volunteer returnees from being influenced or intimidated by the other VBP (Chan, 2012).

During 1989, 7,897 VBP went through the screening process. Of these only 587 or 7.4 per cent were screened-in as refugees. Afterward, 4,954 of those who were screened-out appealed, 392 of them were successful and were granted refugee status (Hong Kong, 1990, pp. 349-350).

Throughout 1989, there were 34,116 VBP arrivals and 1,650 babies born, 4,740 left for resettlement overseas and 14 left for resettlement in HK. At the end of the year, 4,930 VBP were in two open-centres, 7,092 VBP in two closed-centres, 43,702 in 12 detention centres, and 321 ECVII awaiting repatriation to China. The remaining VBP population in HK was still over 50,000 (Hong Kong, 1990, pp. 350-351).

The HK Government continued to spend a huge amount of its public funds and utilize the little land that they had to house, feed and look after arrivals from Vietnam. The cost of providing for the VBP in 1989 amounted to HK\$471 million. It included HK\$340 million spent on detention centres – HK\$122 million on closed-centres, and HK\$9 million on the open-centres. The UNHCR contributed only HK\$50 million. An additional HK\$472 million was also spent on the construction and maintenance of existing HK centres (Hong Kong, 1990, p. 351).

## **1990: The UN warned HK about tensions in Whitehead Detention Centre**

The year started with various criticisms made by Amnesty International of the refugee screening procedures and poor treatment of the VBP (Chan, 2012). It was noted that there had been a great deal of tension in the camps, which had made its management very difficult. In response, the Governor stated that while the VBP problem had understandably provoked strong emotion, HK would not allow violence to become a way of life in the camps for VBP (Chan, 2012).

On 19 January, violence broke out at the Whitehead Detention Centre, resulting in 7 people being injured and one died. On 14 February, following a large fight at Whitehead Detention Centre between the VBP from Hai Phong and Quang Ninh groups, a search was conducted and this time more than 500 homemade weapons were seized (Chan, 2012) – nearly double the homemade weapons found previously.

On 16 February, after being screened out as a political refugee, a 27-year old Vietnamese committed suicide. Mr Nguyen Van Hai hanged himself in a toilet cubicle at Whitehead Detention Centre (Gomez, 1990).

During the month of April, over 150 VBP escaped from Whitehead Detention Centre and were recaptured (Law, 2014, p. 222). Members of the Omelco Security panel were concerned that the mass escape had an adverse effect on the daily lives of the residents living nearby (Ng, 1990).

On 2 May, the Government announced that skills training would be provided for VBP in detention centres to equip them with the necessary capabilities to quickly rebuild their lives upon their return to Vietnam (Chan, 2012). Early in the morning of 3 May, about 20 VBP cut through the fence of the Whitehead Detention Centre, which held 22,000 detainees. This breakout group emerged onto a road wielding weapons. Minutes later the group had grown to about 30. Police discharged 14 rounds of teargas to force the VBP back into the centre. Mr Robert Van Leeuwen, local representative of the UNHCR explains: ‘tensions in the camp were... running so high that neither the Government nor the Vietnamese camp leaders were really in control’ (Braude, 1990, p. 11). He pointed out that it was not surprising for the Vietnamese to want to break out, given the conditions in this camp, which earlier UN warned had become “a monster” too big to control (Braude, 1990, p. 11).

At dawn on 4 May, a small army of about 1,200 police raided the Whitehead Detention Centre, fired more than 100 rounds of tear-gas and spent the next 11 hours collecting 2,500 pieces of homemade weapons (see photo A.8). The local public deemed the style and scale of the raid, an ‘over-reaction’ (“No justification for ill-treating children”, SCMP, 12 May 1990). The UNHCR also joined the criticism of police tactics, especially the use of teargas in the confined surroundings of a facility, which contained 8,500 children under 17 and 6,000 women.

The day after the massive operation, the front-page of the South China Morning Post (SCMP) displayed confronting photographs of police officers in riot gear at Whitehead Centre, one of which showed a small Vietnamese girl being body-searched. Around this time, the HK field director of Save The Children Fund, Mr Phillip Barker, warned

that the community would “pay the political price” for this hard-hearted attitude (“No justification for ill-treating children”, SCMP, 12 May 1990).

In early May, the Secretary for Security, Mr Alistair Asprey announced that due to increasing gang activities in Vietnamese camps, the Government might consider using the army to manage some of the centres. He further stated that one of his main concerns was the manufacture of weapons in the detention centres and refugee camps. Vietnamese used the weapons when they fought among each other or against government staffs. More than 8,000 weapons had been seized in the past two years (Ng, 1990). On 31 May, a Vietnamese refugee was sentenced to death for murdering a fellow countryman with a sharpened iron bar at the Sham Shui Po open camp (Chan, 1990).



**Photo A.8. Weapons search at Whitehead detention centre. Source: SCMP**



In early June, Dr Maurice Eisenbruch, who had worked with Cambodian and Vietnamese refugees since 1979, visited various detention centres in HK. Of the 44,133 VBP populations, it was estimated that at least a third were children. His observation of the Whitehead Detention Centre, where people were housed in family units on plywood bunks, was that there was no privacy and the children were witness to everything, including sex (see photo A.9). Dr Eisenbruch stated: “I think every developmental task facing any human child is violated in these conditions”. Furthermore, he was concerned about babies not being able to develop a basic trust in the world because the situation in the camps might lead their parents to abandon them on occasions. Dr Eisenbruch added “all of these circumstances for a small child would lead to a loss of expectation that the world is safe and that would sow the seeds for problems in later life” (McMahon, SCMP, 4 June 1990).



**Photo A.9. Kai Tak Open Centre. Source: Cary Kassebaum**

The UNHCR organized a Voluntary Repatriation Program (VOLREP) to encourage non-refugees to return to Vietnam. Between the start of the program in March 1989 and end 1990, 6,313 Vietnamese have voluntarily returned to Vietnam (Hong Kong 1991, p. 379).



Based on the number of arrivals in 1990 – 6,599 versus 34,000 in 1989, the screening policy seemed to have had some effect in discouraging Vietnamese people coming to HK. At the end of the year, there were three open-centres and 10 detention centres holding 52,036 VBP, of which one third were children (Hong Kong 1991, pp. 378-379).

In January, it was announced that the British Government had made an additional contribution of HK\$148 million towards the running of VBP centres in HK. The costs of looking after the VBP and refugees during the year came to HK\$637 million (Chan, 2012; Hong Kong 1991, p. 379).

### **1991: Huge increase in number of VBP arrivals, Orderly Repatriation Program, and annual cost to look after VBP reaching HK\$ 1 billion**

The positive effect of the screening policy did not last long. The number of VBP who arrived in HK during 1991 was nearly three times the number of the previous year. Among the 20,200 new arrivals were some ‘Double-Backers’. These were the Vietnamese who returned to Vietnam once and benefitted from the UNHCR repatriation assistance, then re-entered HK the second time. From this year onward, the British HK Government referred to all new arrivals from Vietnam as ‘Vietnamese illegal immigrants’ (Hong Kong 1992, p. 251).

The big wave of new arrivals in HK posed major accommodation problems. A new detention centre was constructed on Tai A Chau Island with capacity for up to 10,000 people. The construction cost was HK\$230 million. This upsurge of VBP prompted

the HK community to call for an end to the policy of first asylum (Hong Kong 1992, pp. 369-370).

On 17 January, it was announced that the regular flights carrying VBP who volunteered to return to Vietnam would make a special stop in South Vietnam to allow 29 VBP to disembark at Ho Chi Minh City. This was the first time a group of southerners had returned from HK (Chan, 2012).

On 29 October, announcement was made about the signed 'Statement of Understanding' between the Vietnamese Government and the UK/HK Government on the return of Vietnamese illegal immigrants in HK through the Orderly Repatriate Program (ORP). The program applied to all new arrivals found to be illegal immigrants and to all Vietnamese illegal immigrants already in the detention centres (Chan, 2012).

On 8 November, the first group of VBP returned to Vietnam under the ORP. The two-day operation began with the 59 VBP being transferred from Hei Ling Chau Detention Centre to a holding facility at the Kai Tak Airport where they spent the night. On the next day, they were taken to the airplane to return to Vietnam (Chan, 2012). According to Law (2014, p. 224), media attention was drawn to scenes of the removal of the VBP from Hei Ling Chau Detention Centre, including images of the violent boarding of some individuals.

Throughout the year, 1,013 marriages and 1,639 births were register. Special arrangements were made in detention centres to register marriages and births for the VBP (Hong Kong 1992, p. 368). At the end of the year, there were nearly 60,000 VBP

in HK. The arrival rate was very high compared to the departure rate, hence the detention centres were more crowded than at the beginning of the year. Throughout the year 7,700 VBP returned to Vietnam voluntarily, and 6,500 resettled overseas. Of the 60,000 remaining VBP, 20,400 had been screened out and 32,500 were awaiting screening (Hong Kong 1992, p. 370). The cost of looking after the VBP in 1991, came to HK\$1.2 billion, of which HK\$1.195 billion was spent on detention centres and HK\$4 million on open-centres (Hong Kong 1992, p. 371).

### **1992: Riot in detention centre left 24 VBP burned to death, and biggest drop in the number of new arrivals of VBP**

Only 12 new arrivals were recorded in 1992. This was an astounding drop compared to the 20,200 arrivals in the previous year (Hong Kong 1993, p. 253).

On 3 February 1992, a violent disturbance took place in Detention Centre triggered off by an argument between Vietnamese northerners and southerners. It was the worst disaster during the 17 years of VBP taking refuge in HK. Buildings were set on fire, which claimed 24 lives, including 12 children, and injured more than 100. Because of the severity of the incident, the detention centre was closed at the end of the year (Law, 2014, p. 224).

The Governor, Lord Wilson appointed Justice of Appeal, Michael Kempster to conduct an independent enquiry into the incident, which the Government deemed a great tragedy and a serious criminal act (Chan, 2012). Mr Kempster's findings revealed that the tragedy could have been averted if police had acted more quickly. The police were criticised for not using their substantial stocks of teargas, for failing to have an

officer in overall command at the scene for 27 minutes and for allowing communications between security personnel to break down. One hundred and seventy-three Vietnamese from the camp were arrested and were charged with rioting. Ten of them have also been charged with the murder of a two-year-old boy in the incident (McMahon, SCMP, 10 April 1992).

In February, Steve Vines from the SCMP reported: 'Vietnam has told Britain that it wants per head payment for accepting boat people deported from HK'. Vietnam's demand for new funds was holding up the agreement on a plan to return tens of thousands of VBP in HK detention centres who were screened-out. Britain was hoping to clear about 50,000 VBP in two years through a combination of voluntary and mandatory repatriation programs, at a rate of 2,000 VBP a month. However, it could be difficult for HK to achieve this goal due to the new demand from Vietnam. A British diplomat stated that a possibility to give funds to Vietnam was only probable once a full-scale repatriation program was in place, not beforehand (Vines, 1992).

In April, the UNHCR, who supervised voluntary repatriation, signed an initial contract with Vietnam Airlines for 24 flights to take Vietnamese who had volunteered to return back to Vietnam. This movement meant significant savings for the UNHCR. Previously, the UNHCR paid other carriers an average of US\$345 (HK\$2,670), and up to US\$425 a seat. Now, Vietnam Airlines was charging US\$240 a seat (McMahon, 1992).

On 12 May, the British HK Government signed a further agreement with Vietnam that would allow the return of all those who had arrived in HK after 29 October 1991, and were determined to be non-refugees (Law, 2014, p. 224).

On 26 May, more than 400 police officers were deployed to conduct a search at Tai A Chau Detention centre. Consequently, 749 homemade weapons and over 400 litres of illicit alcohol were seized (Chan, 2012).

In June, the British HK Government agreed to contribute HK\$10 million to finance small-scale infrastructure projects in the areas from which most economic migrant were exiting in Vietnam in order to raise living standards and increase employment opportunities for returnees. The contribution, according to Fiona McMahon, reporter of the (SCMP) “would only be a drop in the ocean compared to the US\$113 million (HK\$ 873.37 million) the European Community has pledged” (McMahon, SCMP, 27 June 1992).

On 29 October, the British HK Government issued a new policy. All new arrivals from this date and after would be screened immediately. Those screened out as non-refugees would be repatriated promptly (Hong Kong 1993, p. 253).

The increasing numbers of ECVII had caused serious social problems in HK, particularly the marriages between ECVII and VBP. Given that the ECVII would be deported back to China and the VBP, if found to be non-refugees, would be sent back to Vietnam would result in families split up. The Government had warned the involved parties of the possibility of families being broken up before the marriage. In response,

the UNHCR was prepared to assist a repatriated spouse to apply through normal procedures in China to reunite with their spouse in Vietnam and vice versa (Chan, 2012).

Although the number of VBP arrivals was small, 1992 was a busy year for various departments. During the year, the Army's maritime troop moved some 10,000 VBP between detention centres, and the Royal Navy assisted in the transfer of the returnees under the ORP. The CSD looked after 32,746 VBP in addition to prison inmates (Hong Kong 1993, p. 273).

Throughout the year, 3,439 resettled overseas, 421 births were recorded, and 12,647 repatriated to Vietnam and China. At the end of the year, the population of VBP in HK was 45,387, of whom 2,600 were classified as refugees, 27,245 were classified as non-refugees, 15,547 were pending screening, and 70 were ECVII (Hong Kong 1993, p. 253).

### **1993: Increased in the number of ECVII arrivals**

The number of VBP arrivals from Vietnam during 1993, maintained remarkably low, at 101. Meanwhile, from June to August, about 2,400 ECVII arrived in HK. It was the highest number since 1987 (Hong Kong 1994, p. 277).

On 12 July, a small group of VBP at Nei Kwu Chau Detention Centre barricaded themselves in one of the dormitory huts to protest against a transfer of 50 VBP to Hei Ling Chau Detention Centre for repatriation. Pepper sprays were used to evict a number of VBP who refused to be moved (Chan, 2012).

With more than 30,000 VBP to care for, heavy demands continued to be placed on various government departments throughout the year. The Police Department regularly conducted searches for homemade weapons, illegal items and alcohol-brewing equipment in the detention centres. Furthermore, the Army's maritime troop had moved some 10,000 VBP between locations due to closing of several detention centres, and sometimes due to the effect of typhoons. The Royal Navy also assisted in the transfer of Vietnamese returnees on a monthly basis (Hong Kong 1994, p. 313).

The UNHCR provided financial assistance to the returnees to help them resume their normal lives in Vietnam. Similarly, the reintegration assistance program run by the European Community in Vietnam offered returnees job-creation schemes, training courses and start-up loans for businesses. It also helped finance local infrastructure and health projects. To complement these international efforts, the British HK Government contributed a further HK\$15 million to raise living standards and increase employment opportunities for returnees (Hong Kong 1994, p. 415). With the average rate of repatriations to Vietnam at a thousand a month, the Government's aim was to close all VBP camps by 1996, especially before the handover in 1997 (Chan, 2012).

As part of a plan to encourage VBP to return to Vietnam, the UNHCR announced a reduction of the repatriation allowance from US\$360 to US\$240. Returnees would only receive the full US\$360 if they volunteered to repatriate before the end of February next year. This scheme prompted a noticeable increase in volunteers in this year (McKenzie, 1994).

Throughout the year, 2,571 were resettled overseas, 12,751 were repatriated to Vietnam, and 1,518 ECVII were returned to China. At the end of the year, the total number of VBP in HK stood at 32,052, of whom 1,846 were accorded refugee status, 27,564 were classified as non-refugees, 1,687 were awaiting screening, and 318 births were registered (Hong Kong 1994, pp. 277, 415). The cost of looking after the VBP in HK in 1993 amounted to HK\$1.209 billion (Hong Kong 1994, p. 416).

### **1994: Britain made incentive payments to VBP for volunteer repatriation, and 6,000 VBP participated in hunger strikes**

This was a particularly challenging year for HK, as camp management had to deal with fierce resistance from VBP toward ORP and the screening policy. With the atmosphere in the camp becoming increasingly tense, there were frequent outbreaks of violence. Demonstrations took place regularly at Tai A Chau, High Island and Whitehead detention centres.

In February, the Fifth Steering Committee of the International Conference on Indo-Chinese Refugees met in Geneva. It set the end of 1995 as the target date for the return of all non-refugees in first asylum countries to Vietnam. A technical meeting followed in June, at which resettlement countries agreed to accept more of the refugees who had been in the camps in the region over a long period (Hong Kong 1995, p. 450).

On 7 April, a joint operation conducted by CSD staff and the police, aimed at moving some 1,400 VBP from Whitehead Detention Centre to the High Island Detention Centre, ended in confrontation with over 3,000 VBP at Whitehead Detention Centre. Some 400 VBP climbed onto the roofs of their dormitories and refused to move.



Reportedly, when they refused to come down from the roof, three rounds of teargas were launched at them. In the third round more than 300 cartridges and grenades were continuously fired at them for about five minutes (Ng, 1994). During the riot, 557 rounds of teargas were discharged, and 213 people were injured. Two were sent to hospital for further treatment. In the aftermath, the VBP at Whitehead Detention Centre complained about the use of teargas and assaults by CSD staff resulting in an official inquiry by Justices of Peace (Hong Kong, 1995, p. 309).

Throughout the month of May, a daily average of 570 VBP in Whitehead Detention Centre and High Island staged a hunger strike to protest against repatriations. On 31 May, 6,000 VBP in both detention centres refused to take food (Chan, 2012).

On 7 August, the Refugee Concern group delivered to Governor Chris Patten a report, compiled by two Justices of Peace, regarding the raid on Section 7 of the Whitehead Detention Centre on 7 April. According to Scott McKenzie from the SCMP, ‘the Government will be called on to sack or demote several top-level CSD officers, including the Commissioner’ (McKenzie, SCMP 8 July 1994). The report revealed that information provided to the public about the incident by officials was incorrect and misleading regarding the number of casualties. The Refugee Concern group report was strongly critical of the Secretary for Security and the Refugees Co-ordinator for approving the decision not to give prior notice of the raid to the VBP. Other questions raised were about the motive of the operation, and its relation to the subsequent hunger strikes and demonstrations, and their effects on the UNHCR’s volunteer repatriation program (McKenzie, SCMP 8 July 1994).

Based on Chan's summary (2012), the Justices of the Peace's inquiry also recommended a number of other things, including a team of independent monitors be present during future operations of this type. In addition, the assault allegations resulted in charges being brought against three CSD officers of five counts of assault. In August, in response to the slow rate of repatriation, the British government introduced a special allowance of US\$150 per head for the VBP who volunteered to return to Vietnam before the end of the year. The special allowance was applicable to all Vietnamese who arrived before 27 September 1991. The HK Refugee Coordinator, Brian Bresnihan said "for a family of four, this is US\$600 – about twice the average annual income in Vietnam – so this is a good incentive coupled with the US\$240 offered by the UNHCR, which they receive after returning to Vietnam" (McKenzie, 1994).

This offer resulted in an increase in the numbers of returnees. A total 5,581 persons returned to Vietnam voluntarily during the year (Hong Kong, 1995, pp. 448-449). However, it was thought that the incentives 'may prompt Viet influx' (McKenzie, SCMP, 6 August 1994, p. 1). Refugee Concern group chairman, Pam Baker shared a concern that it could lead the people in Vietnam to falsely believe they could financially benefit from coming to HK. Hence, Mr Bresnihan stressed the importance of making sure the people in Vietnam were aware that they would not be eligible for the grant if they came to HK now (McKenzie, 1994).

On 18 September, violence erupted when a group of VBP was transferred to Victoria Prison in preparation for their return to Vietnam. About 700 CSD and police officers were involved in the operation. As a result, 155 VBP sought medical treatments, 39

CSD officers were injured, and 2 VBP who slashed their wrists were sent to the hospital for treatment (Chan, 2012). Due to an increase in the number of self-inflicting injuries among the VBP in Whitehead Detention Centre, additional counsellors from various divisions of CSD were sent to assist VBP in distress (Chan, 2012). It was believed that VBP self-inflict injuries to enter HK hospitals. According to Dr Alison Reid, the Head of the Prince of Wales Hospital, on any one day, on average there were six VBP in-patients and more than half would be there because they deliberately harmed themselves. Dr Reid also claimed that ‘about 20 nights of a month, one of these patients will “abscond” into the night.’ (The Medical Post, 24 September 1996).

During the year, there were 363 VBP arriving in HK, 1,504 refugees were resettled, and 1,149 births were recorded, 5,823 VBP were repatriated to Vietnam and 549 ECVII were returned to China. At the end of the year, the total number of VBP in HK stood at 24,757, plus 447 were ECVII (Hong Kong 1995, pp. 309, 448).

By the end of this year, the ‘refugee status determination’ of all VBP who had arrived in HK since June 1988, was completed. Of the 71,700 arrivals, 12,700 had volunteered to return to Vietnam before screening whilst of the 59,000 who had been screened, only 6,700 were verified as refugees. However, the RSRB later verified another 2,800 to be refugees. The Government estimated the total cost of the screening program to be around HK\$600 million (Chan, 2012). Consequently, the cost of VBP care in 1994, amounted to HK\$930 million (Hong Kong 1995, p. 449).

**1995: Australia offered new resettlement scheme to VBP, and false hopes of resettlement in the United States for VBP brought Repatriation Program to a halt**

The year 1995, proved to be another frenetic period for HK's authorities as the VBP were uncooperative and displayed strong resistance toward repatriation and camp transfers. On 15 January, over 200 VBP at Tai A Chau Detention Centre demonstrated against the repatriation of a Vietnamese youth under the UNHCR's family reunion program. The youth was an unaccompanied minor, who was screened out as a non-refugee, had submitted an application to the court in HK to reunited with his relatives in the US. The court ruling rejected his application, the UNHCR Chief of Mission, Mr Jahansha Asadi also confirmed that the youth's best interest was to be with his family in Vietnam as soon as possible (Chan, 2012).

In March, the Sixth Steering Committee of the International Conference on Indo-Chinese Refugees met in Geneva and set the end of 1995 as the target date for the return of all non-refugees to Vietnam for the Southeast Asia countries that had agreed to act as first port of asylum. For HK, which held about half of the Vietnamese population in the region, the target date was set for shortly after the end of 1995. It was also agreed that simplified procedures should be adopted for the return of the VBP (Hong Kong, 1996, p. 399).

On 20 May, VBP from all sections of the Whitehead Detention Centre detention centre strongly resisted when the police and the CSD tried to move more than 1,500 of them to High Island Detention Centre. Large quantities of rocks, neon lights, spears and other weapons were thrown at the police and CSD staff from the rooftops. Order was restored after a 13-hour operation – 3,250 rounds of teargas were discharged, resulting in 27 VBP and 180 CSD and Police being injured (Hong Kong 1996, p. 270; Law, 2014, p. 224).

Afterward, an independent monitor expressed her concern about the effect of teargas on women and children. Another monitor also commented that the residue of the teargas was strong and its effect on the camp population should be assessed (Chan, 2012).

On 8 June, the night before an operation to move 100 VBP to Victoria Prison in preparation for a repatriation flight, the VBP in High Island Detention Centre set fire to the camp kitchen and several buildings. Again, teargas was used to restore law and order. The act of burning down buildings had caused anger among HK residents (Hong Kong 1996, p. 270).

On 14 June, independent monitors observed a repatriation of 100 VBP and reported that six men strongly resisted and were carried onto the aircraft hand-cuffed and wrapped in blankets (Chan, 2012). In the early hours of 16 July, about 90 VBP escaped from High Island Detention Centre. A major search involving the Police, CSD and the Government Flying Services was launched. Afterward, 21 of the escapees were arrested and returned to High Island Detention Centre (Chan, 2012).

On 7 September, the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman in HK, Mr Chen Jian stated that China would not continue the first-asylum policy and that those VBP who remained in HK after 1997 would have to go back to Vietnam or Britain (Wong, 1995). In October, the Australian Immigration Department offered a scheme that would allow up to 600 VBP to resettle in Australia. The program enabled VBP in HK to re-unite with their relatives in Australia. To be eligible the applicants must receive a written undertaking of support from a close relative who had been an Australian citizen or

permanent resident since 1 January the previous year. However, first, the applicants had to return to Vietnam by 1 January the following year. The Australian Government promised to provide the applicant and their family with certain assistance, such as food, accommodation, obtaining employment and access to community and public services during the first six months of their arrival (McKenzie, 1995).

On 10 October, 163 VBP were transferred from High Island Detention Centre to Victoria Prison in preparation for their return to Vietnam. Overnight until the next day, VBP at High Island Detention Centre threw stones at CSD officers; they barricaded the accommodation entrances and set fire to the centre clinic and the water tanks. Teargas was used, 12 CSD officers and 2 Police officers sustained injuries during the incident (Chan, 2012).

On 24 October, nine hours after the plane had landed at Noi Bai airport in Ha Noi, the last of the 84 Vietnamese returnees on board were carried down the stairs of the Royal Brunei 767. At the last minute, consent was given by the Vietnamese authority to allow HK security officers to carry VBP from a forced repatriation flight. The consent came in right before a safety deadline, which would have grounded the plane and crew in Hanoi overnight (Torode and Gilbert, 1995).

On 30 November, 192 VBP were scheduled to be transferred to Victoria Prison, about 400 VBP climbed onto the roofs of their dormitories and about 1,800 VBP gathered in the open space below to protest against transfer. It took CSD three hours to remove the VBP from the rooftops. By 8 pm, the transfer was completed. Reportedly, a dozen of VBP and CSD staff were injured during the resistance (Chan, 2012).

The number of VBP repatriated that year dropped by 58 per cent compared to the previous year. In April, a special allowance of US\$150 was offered to VBP who volunteered to return to Vietnam. This financial incentive saw an increase in the number of volunteers. However, the repatriation program was brought to a halt when in May, legislation initiatives in the US Congress suggested that some migrants might have a chance of resettlement overseas. The US Administration subsequently tried to dispel the false hopes of resettlement overseas for VBP. They verified that the initiative was a US/Vietnam bilateral program. They also offered those migrants who volunteered to return to Vietnam, within a specified period, a chance to be interviewed by the US Immigration and Naturalization Services (Hong Kong, 1996, p. 399).

The number of VBP arrivals continued to drop as well as the number of resettlements. In 1995, 460 VBP arrived in HK, 548 resettled overseas and 2,638 were repatriated to Vietnam and China. At the end of the year, there were 21,704 VBP remaining in HK, of whom 1,479 were awaiting resettlement and the rest were pending repatriation (Hong Kong, 1996, p. 400). The cost to look after the VBP in 1995 was HK\$750 million (Hong Kong, 1996, p. 400).

### **1996: the end of the CPA, a record high number of VBP repatriations, and air carriers backed out of flights for VBP returnees**

According to an article in SCMP, the British HK Government could be forced to look to airlines of the former communist Eastern Europe for future Vietnamese repatriation flights after yet another Asian Airlines had backed out (Gilbert and McKenzie, SCMP, 24 January 1996).

The airlines including Continental Micronesia, Cathay Pacific, Eva Air and Royal Brunei were of the opinion that forced repatriation flights were bad for business. In addition, the airlines were concerned about delays caused by protests by returnees on reaching the repatriation destination (Gilbert and McKenzie, SCMP, 24 January 1996).

On 30 January, a scheduled repatriation of 220 VBP was suspended because the British HK Government failed to secure a crew for a chartered flight it had planned to use the following day. The Malaysian Airline aircraft had been secured for the Government on a “dry lease” with no crew supplied (McKenzie, 1996).

In early March, at the Seventh and last Steering Committee of the International Conference on Indo-Chinese Refugees meeting in Geneva, it was agreed that the CPA would end on 30 June 30, 1996. In the case of HK, which then held half of the Vietnamese boat people in the region, it was agreed that the problem should be resolved as soon as possible thereafter (Hong Kong 1997, p. 400).

In late March, British/HK and Vietnamese officials met to discuss ways to accelerate the repatriation of the 19,000 VBP still in camps in HK. The British Prime Minister, Mr John Majors, told reporters that the objective was to resolve the VBP issue entirely before the end of June 1997 (Chan, 2012).

On 6 March, during a transfer of VBP from High Island Detention Centre to Victoria Prison in preparation for the return to Vietnam, a violent confrontation broke out and teargas was fired. During this operation, one CSD officer had his arm broken and another was dragged onto a rooftop and was held hostage by detainees who were armed



with homemade weapons. The captured officer had keys to all gates in the north section of the detention centre and the perimeter gates. Authorities were concerned that a mass breakout could be launched if the detainees used the officer's keys, there were 4,000 VBP in the detention centre at the time.

Assistant CSD Commissioner, Bonnie Wong was called in to coordinate a rescue operation. Twenty-five police trucks, three fire engines and an ambulance were stationed outside the detention centre. A government helicopter and two speedboats from the Marine Police were also on standby. After 11 hours of negotiations, the officer was released unharmed (Chan, 2012; Gilbert, Hill and McKenzie, 1996).

On 10 May, 200 armed VBP escaped, and more than 1,000 VBP were involved when a major riot broke out at the Whitehead Detention Centre. They fired missiles at a patrol car, broke the gates and fences surrounding the detention centre, and set fire to buildings and vehicles. Two thousand CSD and Police were summoned to control the outcry, plus 1,828 rounds of teargas were discharged. The damage included 40 injuries, 53 cars were burnt, 21 CSD buildings, 2 watchtowers and 3 VBP living quarters were destroyed (Hong Kong 1997, pp. 277, 400; Law, 2014, p. 225).

After the incident, more than 900 VBP were immediately transferred from Whitehead Detention Centre to High Island Detention Centre. About 400 VBP climbed onto the rooftops to protest the transfer. Another 240 rounds of teargas were discharged to restore order. By the next day, about 130 VBP who continued to remain on the rooftops were forcibly removed (Chan, 2012).

An incident report was submitted to the CSD by the independent monitors. The monitors expressed a number of concerns about the transferring exercise. After carefully studying the report, the Government ordered various measures to be implemented to reinforce security of the camps, such as strengthening security fencing, deploying more police officers, construction of a secure area for the better management of the camp and improving of the armoury. The total cost of the improvement measures was estimated to be HK\$65 million.

Furthermore, the Government released the report of the enquiries into the circumstances of two Vietnamese girls who had been separated from their parents following the riots at Whitehead Detention Centre. The report was critical of the unsympathetic handling of the situation by CSD staff. Disciplinary proceedings against the staff concerned were recommended (Chan, 2012).

On 11 June, 107 VBP attempted to escape from High Island Detention Centre. They were apprehended and taken to Victoria Prison. Following their arrest, VBP in the detention centre set fire to camp accommodation and attacked several CSD staff. Multiple rounds of teargas were discharged to contain the disturbance (Chan, 2012). On 19 June, VBP at Victoria Prison attacked CSD officers and two of the officers were injured (Chan, 2012).

With repatriations taking place almost weekly, 1996 was an eventful year for the VBP as well as the authorities. Moreover, due to the significantly low number of volunteer repatriation of VBP in Tai A Chau Detention Centre, the British HK Government decided to close the centre in September and relocate 16,000 VBP to Whitehead

Detention Centre. Since most of the VBP population in Tai A Chau were Southerners, the remaining Northerners at Whitehead Detention Centre would be transferred to High Island Detention Centre in order to avoid conflicts among the VBP (Chan, 2012).

All movements of VBP, including the transfer of VBP between detention centres and their repatriation to Vietnam, were observed and reported by independent monitors. According to their reports, most of the movements of VBP were carried out smoothly, with the exception of the following incidents:

- 14 May – plastic handcuffs were used on some VBP who displayed resistance. Bruising was seen on a man’s wrist. A woman was seen limping badly because her feet were tightly cuffed, and the cuffing had cut too deeply into her skin.
- 8 June – Unnecessary force was used on a man who was subdued on the ground after having jumped down from the roof and he was kicked three times in the ribs by the disciplining staff.
- 7 August – during a transfer of 650 VBP from Whitehead Detention Centre to Victoria Prison, the VBP staged a sit-in in their dormitories and had to be removed. Subsequently, a man had jumped from the water tower and was pronounced dead on arrival at the Prince of Wales Hospital.
- On 12, 15 and 22 August, during three repatriation flights, some VBP had displayed resistance by painting ‘SOS’ across their faces

Finally, the number of volunteer returnees had increased. The main contributing factor was the approval from the Vietnamese authorities for flights carrying volunteered repatriations to land in Ho Chi Minh City. In the past, they can only land in Ha Noi.

At the end of the year, there were 7,646 VBP remaining in HK, a major drop from 21,703 in the beginning of the year. During the year 1,029 VBP arrived in the territory, 511 new births of babies born in detention centres were registered, and 15,375 were either resettled overseas or repatriated to Vietnam. (Chan, 2012; Hong Kong 1997, pp. 399, 401).

The total cost to look after the VBP in HK in 1996 was HK\$753 million. The British HK Government also contributed HK\$25 million to small infrastructure projects in Vietnam whilst the UK government contributed HK\$81 million to the Orderly Repatriation Program (Hong Kong 1997, p. 401).

### **1997: A New Era in HK, and UNHCR owed HK Government over one HK\$ billion toward the cost of maintaining VBP in refugee camps**

The handover of HK to China took place on 1 July 1997. At that time its name changed to the HK Special Administrative Region (HKSAR).

At the beginning of the year, the Refugee Concern group alleged in a report to the UN Committee that the British HK Government had denied VBP medical treatments unless they joined the VOLREP. After investigating the three particular cases that were raised, the Government refuted the allegations, maintaining that the claims made were unfounded.

One case involved a child who was diagnosed with leukaemia in 1994; the child was given chemotherapy treatments and received a bone marrow transplant at the Queen Mary Hospital. The child later died after failing to respond to various treatments. The

other case involved a woman with breast cancer who had already repatriated to Vietnam in June 1996. The third case revealed that a VBP involved had not alerted camp authorities about her dental appointment until the day of her repatriation (Chan, 2012).

There was an increase in the number of ECVII since the end of 1996 to 1997, a total of 1,721 persons were intercepted. During the year, 448 VBP were resettled overseas and 4,512 VBP were repatriated. At the end of the year, there were 1,900 VBP remained in the HKSAR. Throughout the year, the Kai Tak VBP Transit Centre and the Whitehead Detention Centre, which once accommodated about 25,000 VBP, were closed. At the end of 1997, High Island was the only Detention Centre for VBP (Hong Kong – A New Era, pp. 266, 383-384).

In late 1991, the population of VBP peaked at 60,000. Six years later, the figure reduced to 6,000. Based on this result, when responding to media interviews regarding the situation of VBP in HK, the Government was confident that if the rate of repatriation remained unchanged, HK would be able to close all refugee camps by mid 1997 (Chan, 2012).

In 1997, the HKSAR Government contributed HK\$25 million toward some small-scale infrastructural projects in Vietnam. The UNHCR was responsible for the costs of the care and maintenance of VBP but for 1997 could meet only HK\$4 million out of the HK\$20 million incurred. Thus, the accumulated debt to HK since 1989 by the UNHCR was HK\$1.16 billion (Hong Kong – A New Era, p. 384).

## **1998: the end of HK First Port of Asylum**

With the formal conclusion of the international agreed CPA, the HKSAR Government ended the port of first asylum policy for Vietnamese with effect from 9 January 1998. Any new Vietnamese arrivals from that date would be repatriated immediately (Hong Kong 1998, p. 397).

In March, the New Horizon Vietnamese Refugee Departure Centre was closed. Later on, in May the last detention centre, the High Island Detention Centre, was closed.

Throughout the year, some 1,200 VBP and ECVII were repatriated to Vietnam and China. At the end of 1998, there were 2,241 VBP remained in HK, pending resettlement or repatriation. (Hong Kong 1998, p. 397).

## **1999: Last group of VBP in HK**

China warned the British HK Government that the holding camps must be empty at the time of the handover in July 1997. However, at the end of 1999, after all resettlements and repatriations, there were 1,352 VBP remaining in the HKSAR. The Government and the UNHCR continued to seek resettlement opportunities for the last and most difficult cases among the tens of thousands of VBP who came to HK (McKenzie, 1996; Hong Kong, 1999, p. 419). Paul Meredith from the United Nations refugee agency said: “The problem is they are refugees nobody wants. Not even their own country.” (Mickleburgh, *The Globe and Mail*, 7 Feb 1997).

About 1,000 of them arrived in HK prior to June 1988, when all VBP were automatically granted refugee status. Many of them developed drug problems and had criminal records. The main resettlement countries – United States, Canada, Britain and Australia, have strict rules preventing them from accepting people with long-term drug habits or criminal records. This group of VBP were branded the ‘homeless cases’. Senior HK Government officials believed that the group would quietly ‘melt into the community’ (McKenzie, SCMP, 6 February 1996). One official said: “They have been here for a long time, so they speak Cantonese and know how things work here. It would be very easy for them to assimilate undetected” (McKenzie, SCMP, 6 February 1996).

### **2000: The end of the VBP crisis in HK**

On 22 February, the HKSAR Government announced a Widened Local Resettlement Scheme to allow 1,352 VBP to apply for settlement in HK. On 1 June, the Pillar Point Refugees Centre - the last Vietnamese refugee camp in HK was closed, which marked the end of the 25-year Vietnamese program in HK (Hong Kong, 2001, p. 422).

Since 1975, HK had received more than 200,000 VBP. Among them, more than 143,000 were resettled in other countries, 67,000 repatriated to Vietnam, 1,300 resettled locally. In addition, more than 23,700 ECVII came to HK and were repatriated to Mainland China (Hong Kong, 2000, p. 422).

## Appendix 2 : Timeline – VBP Crisis in Hong Kong from 1975 to 2000

- 4 May 1975 - First group of Vietnamese refugees arrived were 3743 rescued in the South China by the Danish container ship, *Clara Maersk*
- 19 December 1978 - Arrival of the Panamanian cargo vessel *Huey Fong* with 3,318 people from southern Vietnam
- 7 February 1979 - Arrival of the *Skyluck*, a freighter with over 2,660 Vietnamese refugees on board
- 10 June 1979 - Highest number of refugees arrived in fishing boats in one single day was 4,516
- 27 June 1979 – First Vietnamese refugee riot took place at Kai Tak Camp
- July 1979 – the British Government consented HK as the First Port of Asylum
- Mid-1979 – the first influx of VBP; by the end of September, there were 68,695 VBP in HK, highest since May 1975
- 2 July 1982 - The Hong Kong Government introduced the Closed Camp Policy
- February 1984 – Major disturbances broke out in detention centres, prompted the Government to separate North Vietnamese and South Vietnamese
- 16 June 1988 - Hong Kong Government introduced the Screening Policy applied to all new arrivals in HK to determine whether they were genuine refugees
- Mid-1989 – the second influx of VBP, by December, there were 34,000 new arrivals
- 1989 – the UK, HK and Vietnam signed agreement for a Repatriation Program
- 12 December 1989 – First exercise of Mandatory repatriation of VBP



- April 1992 – First major riot between North and South Vietnamese in Shek Kong Detention Centre caused 24 deaths and 128 injured
- 1994 – Second massive riot in White Head Detention Centre involved over 3,000 Vietnamese, more than 1,000 police and Correctional Officers, helicopters and hundreds round of teargas
- 1996 – Third massive riot in White Head Detention Centre, part of the camp was burnt down, more than 200 detainees escaped, 2,000 thousand CSD and Police were summoned, plus 1,828 rounds of teargas were discharged
- 9 January 1998 - The Government announced the cancellation the First Port of Asylum policy
- 26 May 1998 – Closure of High Island, the last Vietnamese Detention Centre in HK
- 22 February 2000 – the end of VBP, the Government announced a Widened Local Resettlement Scheme to allow some 1400 Vietnamese refugees and eligible Vietnamese migrants to apply for settlement in Hong Kong
- 1 June 2000 – Closure of Pillar Point, the last Vietnamese refugee camp in HK



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## About this project

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This website is part of my PhD research at Curtin University.

My research adds to the field of anthropological and historical studies on refugees, asylum seekers and boat people. Until now, the stories surrounding Vietnamese boat people (VBP) in Hong Kong (HK) have not been presented on the web and the voices of these people have not been heard.

Between 1975 and 2000, more than 213,000 VBP sought asylum in HK, of these 143,000 were resettled in other countries, more than 67,000 were repatriated to their country of origin and 1,368 were resettled locally. The seemingly never ending arrivals of VBP, became known as the 'Vietnamese boat people crisis'. The name exemplified the difficulty of finding resettlement, the financial burden, the riots and disturbances in detention camps, the legal challenges lodged by the VBP regarding the screening procedure, the illegality of detention, and the complex repatriation schemes: forced, voluntary and orderly.

The main objective of the research is to compile a comprehensive historical account of the HK VBP crisis and consequently to identify lessons that can be learnt from the manner in which, the HK Government handled the 25 year long crisis. The study contributes to the existing literature on this subject, by inclusion of stakeholder voices that are missing in research to date: VBP, government officials, NGOs and local citizens.

On the website, research findings are presented visually and with sounds. The website allows me to creatively exhibit materials related to the history of VBP in HK in ways that the traditional written thesis could not, i.e. films and audio interviews. The website includes the voices of the interviewees that reflect their feelings and emotion as they recalled their memories. For example, the magnitude of the historical riot took place on 20 May 1995 in the Whitehead Detention Centre was powerfully depicted in the documentary film, where one can hear the sound of chaos and sense the seriousness of the situation through the scene of thousands of armed police officers pushing themselves against the furious detainees. The website also displays multiple images of artworks created by Vietnamese while they were in detention centres, maps and pictures of the Vietnamese refugee camps and detention centres in HK, and hundreds of images of VBP in HK throughout the 25-year crisis.

You can find further information and analysis at 'espace – Curtin's institutional repository' [espace.curtin.edu.au](http://espace.curtin.edu.au)

The author acknowledges the contribution of an Australian Government Research Training Program Scholarship in supporting this research.



## Archive

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Camps



Chronology



Charts & Statistics

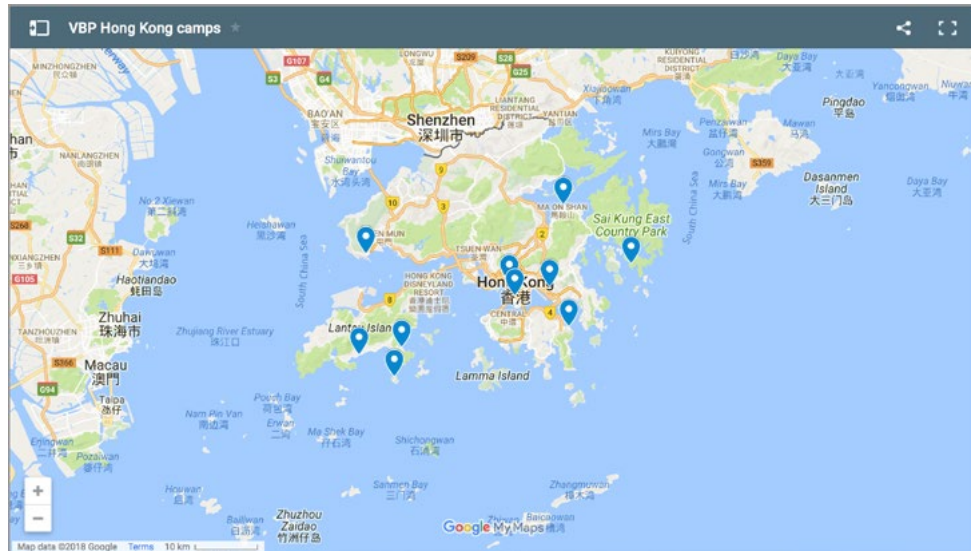


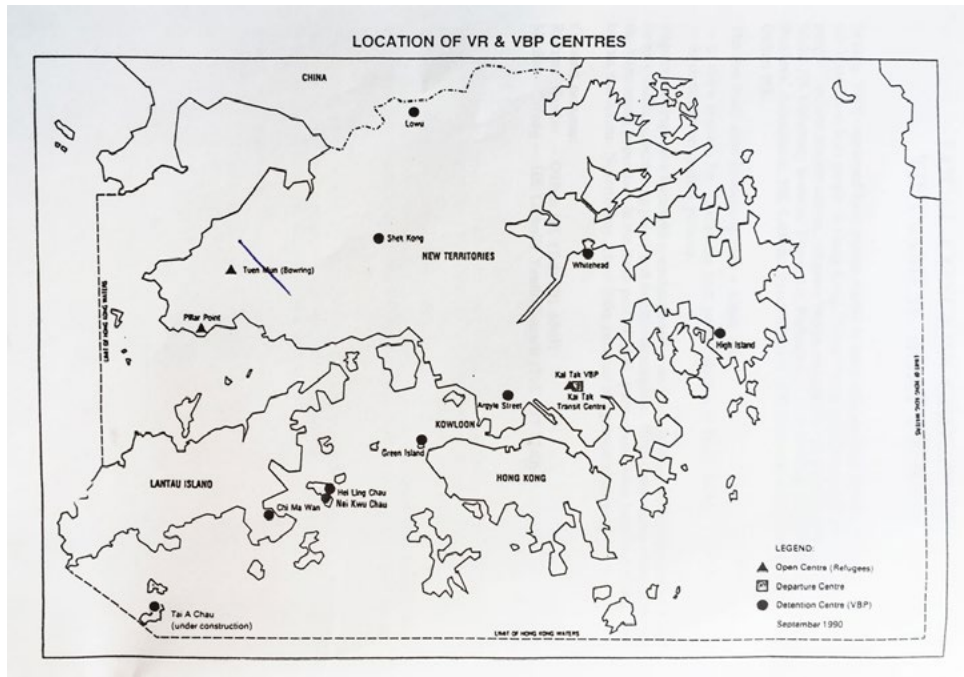
Media Articles

## Camps

### Hong Kong Camps

Vietnamese boat people were interred at camps/detention centres scattered across Hong Kong. The boat people were monitored by Hong Kong Correctional Service Department personnel while their claims to refugee status were examined and processed. You can view more photos of the facilities and their inhabitants in our gallery.





Historical overview of camp locations

### Camp Photos



Argyle Street



Chi Ma Wan



Chi Ma Wan



Chi Ma Wan



Chi Ma Wan



Chi Ma Wan



Chi Ma Wan



Chi Ma Wan



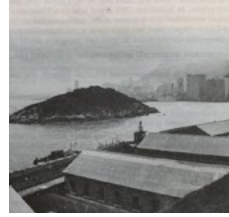
*Chi Ma Wan*



*Government Dockyard*



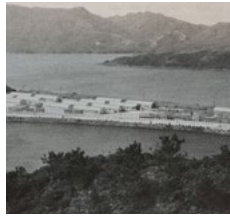
*Government Dockyard*



*Green Island*



*Hei Ling Chau*



*High Island*



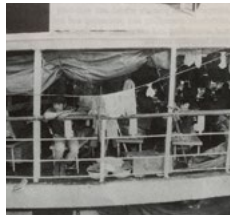
*High Island*



*Pillar Point*



*Sek Kong*



*Stonecutters Island*



*Tai A Chau*



*Tai A Chau*



*Whitehead*



*Whitehead*



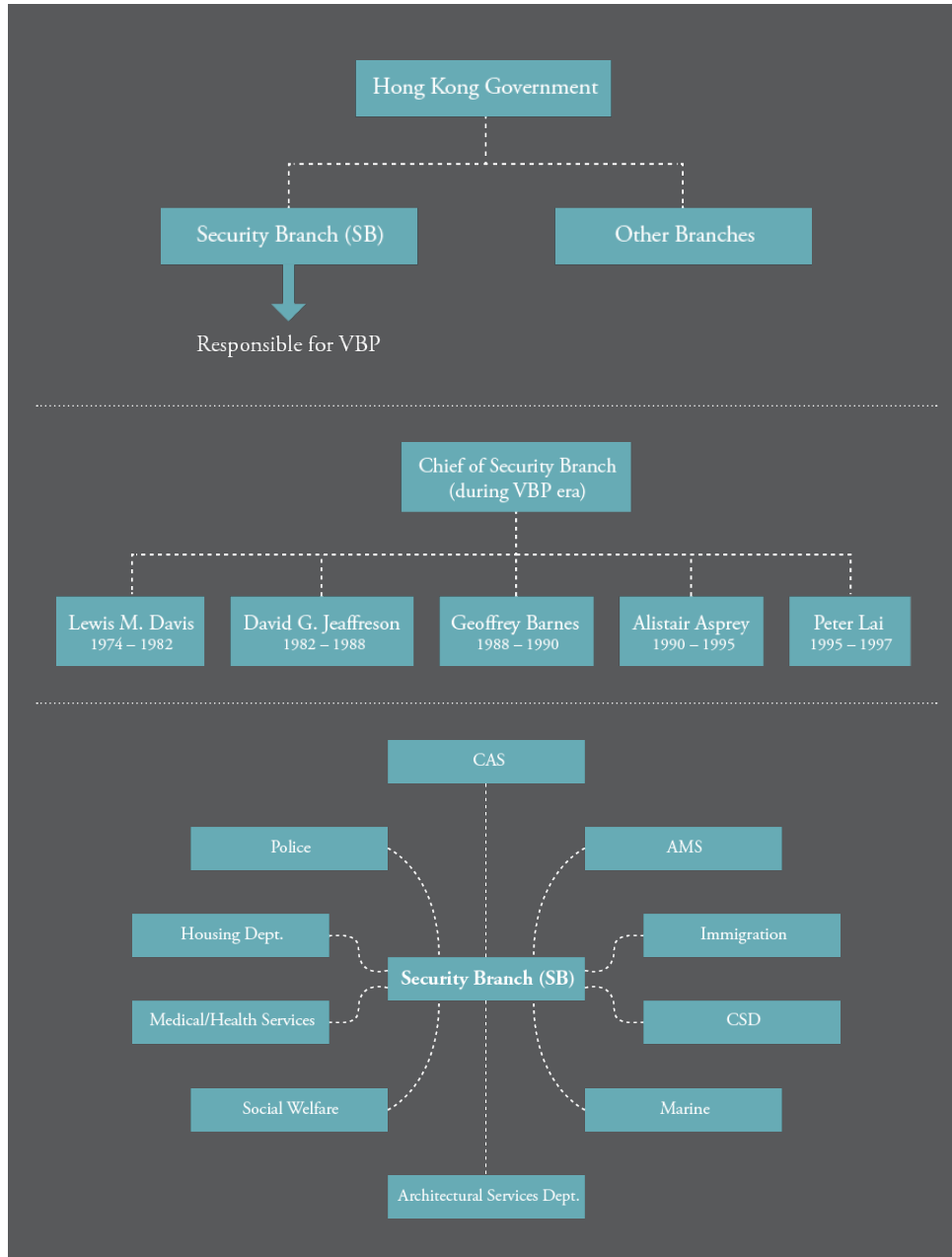
*Whitehead*

## Chronology

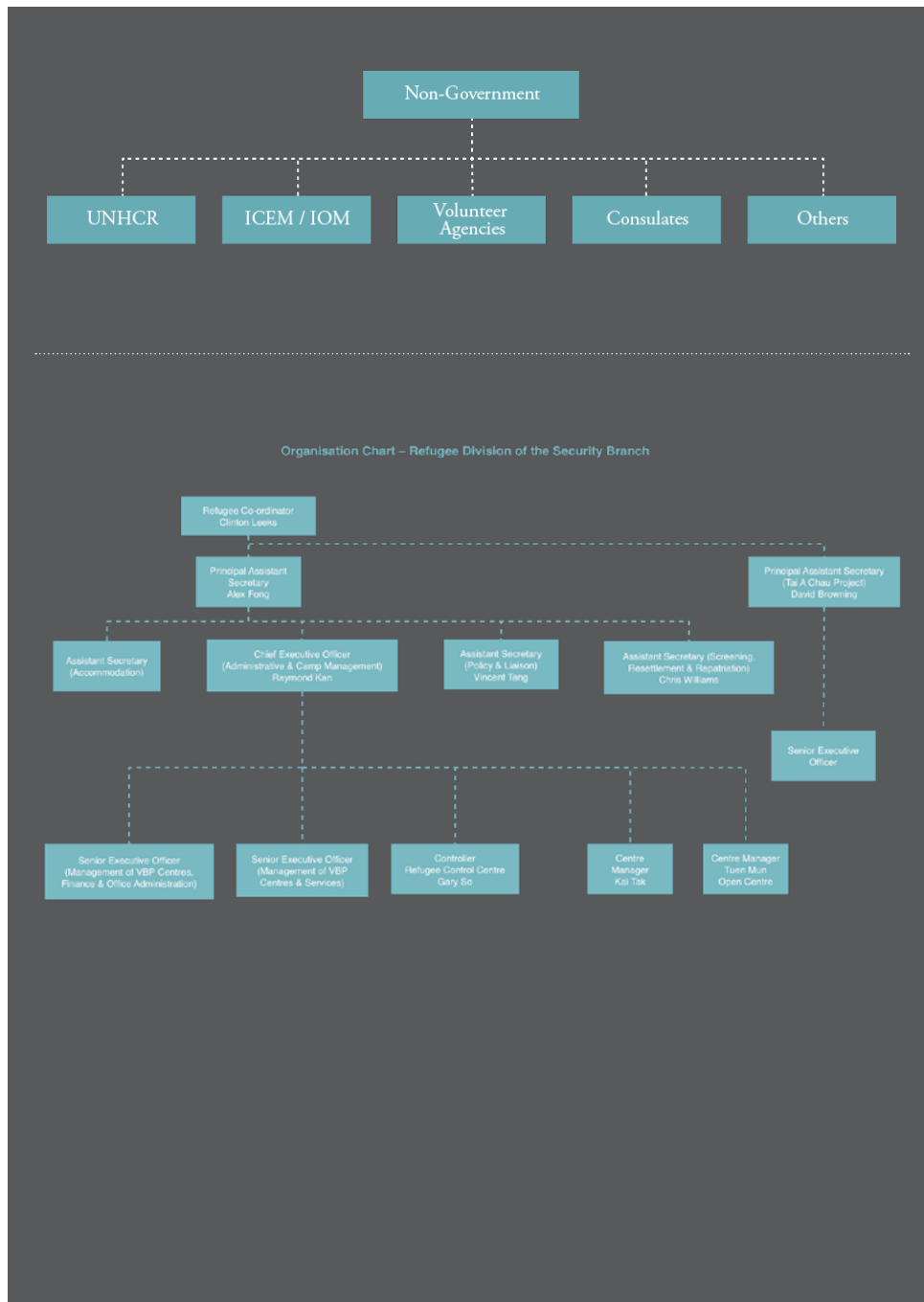
### Timeline – VBP Crisis in Hong Kong from 1975 to 2000

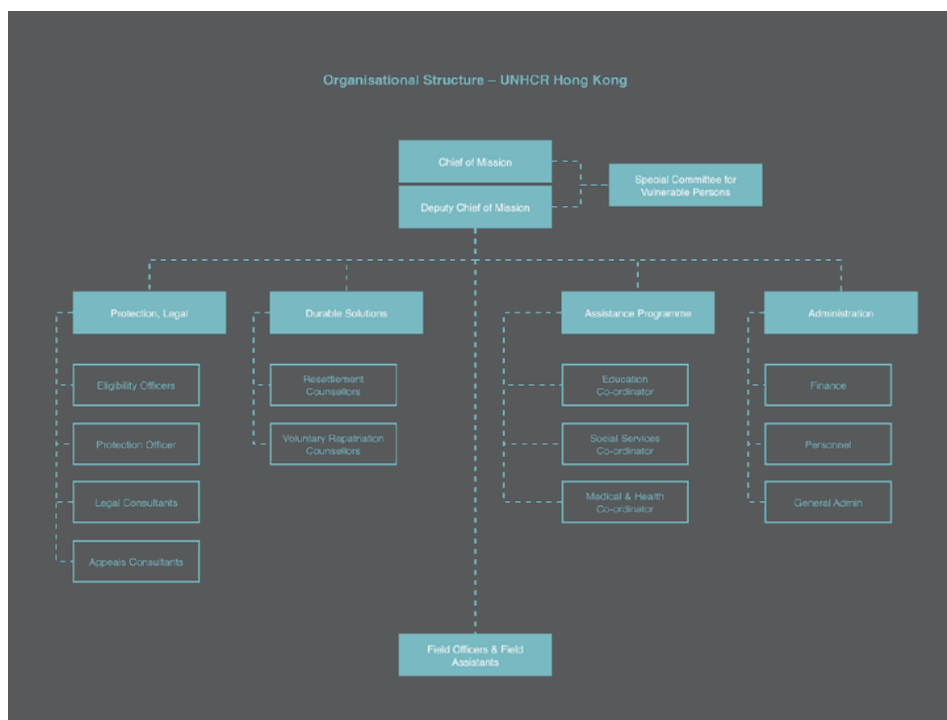
4 May 1975	First group of Vietnamese refugees arrived were 3743 rescued in the South China by the Danish container ship, Clara Maersk
19 Dec 1978	Arrival of the Panamanian cargo vessel Huey Fong with 3,318 people from southern Vietnam
7 Feb 1979	Arrival of the Skyluck, a freighter with over 2,660 Vietnamese refugees on board
10 Jun 1979	Highest number of refugees arrived in fishing boats in one single day was 4,516
27 Jun 1979	First Vietnamese refugee riot took place at Kai Tak Camp
Jul 1979	The British Government consented HK as the First Port of Asylum
Mid-1979	The first influx of VBP. By the end of September, there were 68,695 VBP in HK, highest since May 1975
2 Jul 1982	The Hong Kong Government introduced the Closed Camp Policy
Feb 1984	Major disturbances broke out in detention centres, prompted the government to separate North Vietnamese and South Vietnamese
16 Jun 1988	Hong Kong Government introduced the Screening policy applied to all new arrivals in HK to determine whether they were genuine refugees
Mid-1989	The second influx of VBP. By December, there were 34,000 new arrivals
1989	The UK, HK and Vietnam signed agreement for Repatriation Program
12 Dec 1989	First exercise of Mandatory repatriation of VBP
Apr 1992	First major riot between North and South Vietnamese in Shek Kong Detention Centre caused 24 death and 128 injured
1994	Second massive riot in White Head Detention Centre involved over 3,000 Vietnamese, more than 1,000 police and Correctional Officers, helicopters and hundreds rounds of tear gas
1996	Third massive riot in White Head Detention Centre, part of the camp was burn down and more than 200 detainees escaped
9 Jan 1998	The government announced the cancellation the First Port of Asylum policy
26 May 1998	Closure of High Island, the last Vietnamese Detention Centre in HK
22 Feb 2000	The end of VBP, The government announced a Widened Local Resettlement Scheme to allow some 1400 Vietnamese refugees and eligible Vietnamese migrants to apply for settlement in Hong Kong
1 Jun 2000	Closure of Pillar Point, the last Vietnamese refugee camp in HK

## Charts & Statistics









## Non-Government Organizations provided different services to VBP

- AIHK – Amnesty International HK Section
- BRC – British Red Cross
- CARITAS HK – Founded in 1953 by the Catholic Diocese of HK to offer relief and rehabilitation services to the poor and the distressed
- CFSI – Community and Family Services International
- EFS – Ecoles Sans Frontieres
- FPAHK – The Family Planning Association of HK
- GSAC – Garden Streams: “Art in the Camps” Project
- HKCAR – HK Christian Aid to Refugees
- HKHSR – HK Housing Services for Refugees
- ICRC – International Committee of the Red Cross
- IOM – International Organization For Migration
- ISS HK– International Social Service HK Branch
- JRS – Jesuit Refugee Service (Australian Lawyer Project)
- JVA – Joint Voluntary Agency
- JP – Justice & Peace Commission of the HK Catholic Diocese
- MSF – Medecins Sans Frontieres



- NMS – Norwegian Missionary Society
- OXFAM HK – Oxfam Hong Kong
- PLAYRIGHT – Playright Children’s Playground Assoc. Ltd.
- RCHK – Refugee Concern HK
- REFUGEE RELIEF
- ROTARY – Rotary International
- TREATS – A HK registered charitable trust, founded in 1979, to work with any group of underprivileged children in HK by providing recreational opportunities
- WRHK – World Relief HK Ltd

Table 3.1: Vietnamese Refugee Camps and Detention Centres in Hong Kong from 1975 to 2000

Source: Chan, 2013; *The Refugee Concern Hong Kong Directory, 1991*

CENTRE	PARTICULARS
Argyle	Opened in 1979 as ‘Open-Centre’. Became Detention Centre in 1988
Cape Collinson	Opened in 1988 as Detention Centre
Chi Ma Wan – Lower	Opened in 1982 as ‘Closed-Centre’. Became Detention Centre in 1988
Chi Ma Wan – Upper	Opened in 1985 as ‘Closed-Centre’. Became Detention Centre in 1988
Erskine	Opened in 1988 as Detention Centre
Green Island Reception Centre	Serves as a first station for initial documentation and medical screening for all new arrivals
Hei Ling Chau	Opened in 1982 as ‘Closed-Centre’. Became Detention Centre in 1988
High Island	Opened in 1989 as Detention centre
Jubilee	Opened in 1979 as ‘Open-Centre’
Kai Tak Departure Centre	Opened in 1979. Served as departure centre
Kai Tak Open-Centre	Opened in 1979 as ‘Open-Centre’
Kai Tak Transit Centre	Opened in 1979. Served as an ‘Open-centre’
Lo Wu Detention Centre	Serves as Voluntary Repatriation Transit Centre
Nei Ku Chau	Opened in 1989 as Detention-Centre. Its population was mainly made up of ethnic Chinese

New Horizons	Opened in 1979 as 'Open-Centre'
Pillar Point	Opened in 1989 as a Refugee Centre
Shek Kwu Chau	Opened in 1989 as Detention Centre
Sham Shui Po	Opened in 1979 as 'Open-Centre'
Shek Kong	Opened in 1989 as Detention Centre
Shek Wu Hui	Opened in 1979 as 'Open-Centre'
Stone Cutter	Opened in 1988 as Detention Centre
Tai A Chau	Opened in 1991 as Detention Centre. Detainees were allowed to access to all parts of the island
Tuen Mun	Opened in 1985 as a Reception Centre. Became an 'Open-Centre in 1990
White Head	The largest Detention Centre with population of approximately 22,500 detainees

Table 3.2: Expenditures on Vietnamese Migrants in HK

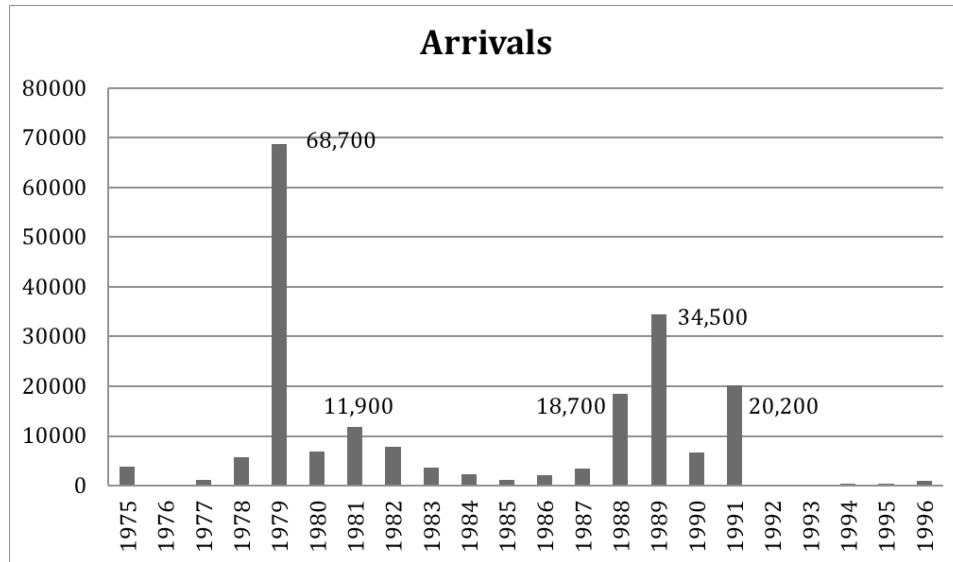
A summary of the expenditure incurred by the HK Government, the British Government and the UNHCR on the care and maintenance of Vietnamese migrants in HK

Source: HK Government, January 1996

Year	HK Government	British Government	UNHCR
79/80 to 88/89	HK\$ 1,316 million		HK\$ 146 million
89/90	HK\$ 819 million	HK\$ 215 million	HK\$ 128 million
90/91	HK\$ 919 million	HK\$ 185 million	HK\$ 182 million
91/92	HK\$ 879 million	HK\$ 202 million	HK\$ 238 million
92/93	HK\$ 1,011 million	HK\$ 98 million	HK\$ 250 million
93/94	HK\$ 908 million	HK\$ 111 million	HK\$ 189 million
94/95	HK\$ 763 million	HK\$ 89 million	HK\$ 132 million
95/96 (estimates)	HK\$ 754 million	HK\$ 81 million	HK\$ 115 million
<b>Total</b>	<b>HK\$ 7,369 million</b>	<b>HK\$ 981 million</b>	<b>HK\$ 1,380 million</b>

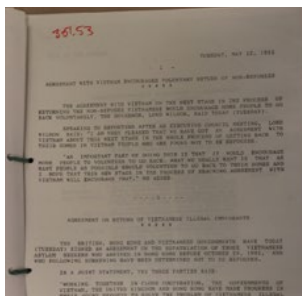
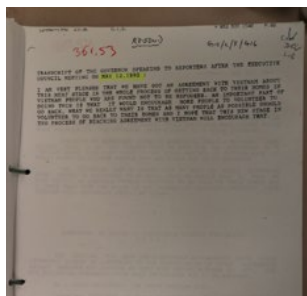
Table 3.3: Arrivals of Vietnamese Migrants in HK

Source: HK Government, January 1996 and other HK Government Annual Reports



# Media Articles

Various articles in the media related to the Vietnamese boat people.



### Refugee group calls for sacking of officers

**SCMP 8.7.74**

The Boat People Committee has called on the British Government to sack the officers of the Royal Australian Air Force who are alleged to have been involved in the mistreatment of boat people in the South China Sea.

The committee, which is based in London, said that it had received reports from boat people that they had been subjected to physical and psychological abuse by the officers of the Royal Australian Air Force while they were in the custody of the Australian Government.

The committee said that it had also received reports that the officers of the Royal Australian Air Force had been involved in the mistreatment of boat people in the South China Sea.

The committee said that it had also received reports that the officers of the Royal Australian Air Force had been involved in the mistreatment of boat people in the South China Sea.

### Camp riot 'raged for hour'

**SCMP 8.7.74**

A riot broke out in a camp for boat people in the South China Sea on Sunday, lasting for about an hour.

The riot was caused by the discovery of a large quantity of opium in the camp, which was being smuggled out to the mainland.

The riot was quickly put down by the camp guards, but several people were injured and a large amount of property was damaged.

The camp authorities said that they were investigating the cause of the riot and would take steps to prevent a recurrence.

### Camp riot witness describes beatings

**SCMP 8.7.74**

A witness to a riot in a camp for boat people in the South China Sea has described the violence and the beatings of the rioters.

The witness, who is a boat person, said that the riot was caused by the discovery of a large quantity of opium in the camp, which was being smuggled out to the mainland.

The riot was quickly put down by the camp guards, but several people were injured and a large amount of property was damaged.

The witness said that he had seen several people being beaten by the camp guards and that he had also seen some people being killed.

The witness said that he was very shocked by what he had seen and that he was now very afraid of the camp guards.

### Crew shortage hits Viet flight

**SCMP 11.7.74**

A shortage of crew members has hit the flight of Vietnamese boat people from the South China Sea.

The shortage is caused by the fact that many of the crew members have been killed or injured in the past few months.

The shortage is also caused by the fact that many of the crew members have been recruited by the Chinese Government to work on the mainland.

The shortage is a serious problem for the boat people, as it means that they are unable to leave the South China Sea in a timely manner.

The boat people are now being held in camps in the South China Sea, where they are being treated very poorly.

### Viets hold CSD man captive in camp

**SCMP 7.3.76**

A Vietnamese boat person has held a Canadian man captive in a camp in the South China Sea.

The Canadian man, who is a member of the Canadian Security Detachment (CSD), was held captive for several days.

The boat person, who is a member of the Viet Cong, said that he had held the Canadian man captive because he was a member of the CSD.

The boat person said that he had also held other members of the CSD captive in the past.

The Canadian man was eventually released and returned to his ship.

### Detention life for children 'devastating'

**SCMP 8.7.74**

The life of children in detention camps in the South China Sea is described as 'devastating'.

The children are being held in camps where they are being treated very poorly.

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The children are being held in camps where they are being treated very poorly.

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In accordance with the understanding reached at the 1975 United Nations Conference on Refugees, the UNHCR is providing technical assistance to the Government of the United Kingdom in the area of refugee resettlement.

The following information has been provided to the Government of the United Kingdom:

- 1. A total of 1,000 Vietnamese refugees have been accepted for resettlement in the United Kingdom.
- 2. A total of 1,000 Vietnamese refugees have been accepted for resettlement in the United Kingdom.
- 3. A total of 1,000 Vietnamese refugees have been accepted for resettlement in the United Kingdom.

Category	Number	Percentage
Total	1000	100%
Male	500	50%
Female	500	50%
Children	100	10%
Adults	900	90%

Category	Number	Percentage
Total	1000	100%
Male	500	50%
Female	500	50%
Children	100	10%
Adults	900	90%

### Returnees carried off plane Force on Viets halts stand-off at airport

**SCMP 29.10.75**

Returnees were carried off a plane at an airport in the South China Sea, where a stand-off between the boat people and the Viet Cong had been taking place.

The stand-off was caused by the fact that the boat people were being held in a camp where they were being treated very poorly.

The stand-off was caused by the fact that the boat people were being held in a camp where they were being treated very poorly.

The stand-off was caused by the fact that the boat people were being held in a camp where they were being treated very poorly.

1. First, all reports of gang related crime are investigated by the police, and where sufficient evidence is available the offenders are prosecuted. In 1989 some 160 VOP/VOF cases were successfully prosecuted for various offences. Not all of these offences were gang related, but a significant proportion were.

2. Secondly, in conjunction with the UNHCR we are endeavouring to curtail the influence of the gangs by developing a more effective representative structure in the camps. Only a small proportion of the boat people and refugee population is associated with these gangs, and our aim is to improve trust and

36153

**REVISED**

Question 2

Will the Government inform this Council whether gang activities have been detected in the closed camps for Vietnamese boat people and if so what is being done to eliminate such activities?

Encl:

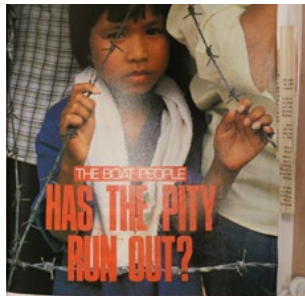
etc.



- 3 -

(2) Finally, Chi Ma Wan upper centre is being converted into a segregation camp for people who have been identified as gang members and troublemakers. The camp will become operational later this month; it should help us to break up some of the gangs and limit the influence of others.

(3) Presently, both CID and the Police operate a policy of frequent and thorough searching of the centres for weapons and this will continue. The manufacture of weapons is a major cause for concern. In the last two years a total of about 1,600 weapons have been



### Hong Kong's Centres for Vietnamese Refugees and Migrants

**Refugee Centres**

Refugee centres which have been opened since October 1978 and other Vietnamese refugees who have been granted asylum in Hong Kong for resettlement purposes are housed in the Three Vietnam Refugee Centres.

All other Vietnamese who are recognized as refugees pending resettlement are accommodated in the Plover Point Vietnamese Refugee Centre managed by the St. Stephen's Management Ltd. on behalf of UNHCR. Refugees in these centres are provided with food, clothing and other necessities for resettlement.

The Plover Point Vietnamese Refugee Centre is provided with basic facilities such as medical infirmary, dining hall, recreational facilities, library, reading area, and open space for outdoor sports. There is also a medical clinic, run by St. Stephen's Hospital, to provide medical care to the refugees. Refuges pending resettlement will be sent to Hong Kong.

Centres and working facilities are available for combining language and skill training programmes which are run by voluntary agencies.

**Detention Centres**

All Vietnamese refugees arriving in Hong Kong on or after 1 June 1978 are accommodated in detention centres pending resettlement, and all those who have been determined by the resettlement authorities as being inadmissible to Hong Kong are detained in these centres pending resettlement in Vietnam.

The detainees are subject to weekly inspections and are not allowed to leave the centres, nor are they permitted to receive visits. The centres are run by the Government and are staffed by the Security Forces. The Government also provides medical services to the detainees. The Government also provides educational and recreational facilities to the detainees. The Government also provides financial assistance to the detainees. The Government also provides other services to the detainees.

### Hong Kong riot police foil breakout at camp

From Jonathan Kwitny, Hong Kong

AN ARMED breakout attempt at a detention camp for Vietnamese refugees in Hong Kong was foiled last night by riot police. The camp, which is run by the Government, is located on the island of Chi Ma Wan. The breakout attempt was made by a group of about 200 refugees. The riot police, who were alerted to the attempt, quickly moved to the camp and surrounded it. The riot police used tear gas and other force to break up the breakout attempt. The riot police also arrested several of the refugees who were involved in the breakout attempt. The riot police also searched the camp for weapons and other contraband. The riot police also searched the camp for other contraband. The riot police also searched the camp for other contraband.



### South China Morning Post

SATURDAY, MAY 12, 1980

### No justification for ill-treating children

LAST Sunday the newspaper carried a photograph of a group of children in a detention camp in Hong Kong. The photograph showed the children in a state of distress and concern. The newspaper also carried an article about the children. The article stated that the children were being ill-treated in the camp. The article also stated that the children were being kept in the camp for a long period of time. The article also stated that the children were being kept in the camp for a long period of time. The article also stated that the children were being kept in the camp for a long period of time.

### Incentives 'may prompt Viet influx'

By SCOTT MARSH

A SURGEON GENERAL has warned that the influx of Vietnamese refugees into Hong Kong could be prompted by incentives offered by the Government. The surgeon general, who is in charge of the health services in Hong Kong, has said that the Government should be aware of the possibility of a large influx of refugees. The surgeon general has said that the Government should be aware of the possibility of a large influx of refugees. The surgeon general has said that the Government should be aware of the possibility of a large influx of refugees.



### Hong Kong police raid camp and take out 'troublemakers'

From Jonathan Kwitny, Hong Kong

ABOUT 150 "troublemakers" were removed from the Vietnamese detention camp in Hong Kong last night. The police, who were alerted to the presence of the troublemakers, quickly moved to the camp and surrounded it. The police used tear gas and other force to break up the troublemakers. The police also arrested several of the troublemakers. The police also searched the camp for weapons and other contraband. The police also searched the camp for other contraband. The police also searched the camp for other contraband.

Notes of a Meeting of the Sanitation Committee held at Refugee Division, Security Branch on 7.5.80

Mr. Henry Ho - Security Branch Mr. H.J. Niseman - CM  
Mr. E.M. Waller - " Mr. T. Hanson - CM  
Mr. W. Wong - SSO

Members discussed the inspection report by Messrs Leung, Ho and Waller for the month of May. The following points were agreed:

(1) Mr. Niseman informed the meeting that part of the reason for the problem at A27 is now overcrowding. The meeting noted that this was inevitable because of the expansion programme in the camp. However, Mr. Niseman advised the members that he has already a plan to deal with the storage problem. He suggested that the members should be asked to check the floors of each hut in turn. This could only be done after the occupants of each hut had been evacuated. There would take some time. Mr. Ho suggested that some kind of hygiene and sanitary habits, Mr. Wong said he would arrange the spraying of the hut with Mr. Hanson. After some discussion members recorded their appreciation of the efforts of the PM Management in improving conditions at the Camp.

Security Branch

GOVERNMENT SECRETARIAT

LOWER ALBERT ROAD

HONG KONG

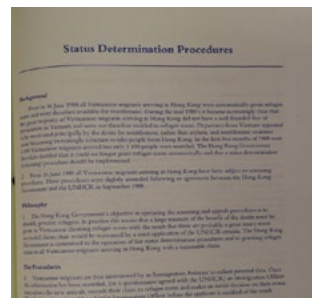
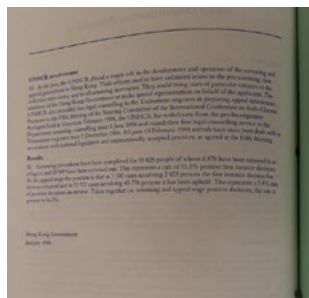
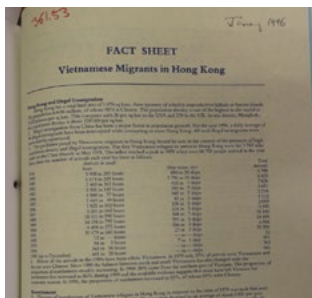
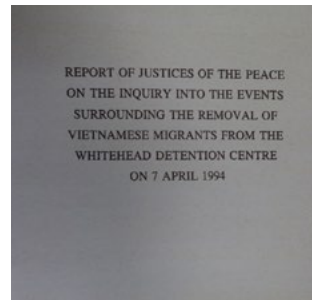
MEMORANDUM (37) 1a 00/42 (C) 5th November 1980

TO: Mr. H.J.J. Niseman, Chief of the Security Branch, For Refugees, Block 14, 3rd floor, Victoria Harbour, Hong Kong.

FROM: Mr. E.M. Waller, SSO

Dear Sir,

I have the pleasure to forward herewith the notes of a meeting held on 4.11.80.





**UNHCR in protest over camp search**  
 SCMP 25.9.78

By IRINA MACMURDO  
 THE United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees yesterday protested to the Government over last week's reported search of Whitehead detention centre which it said would only increase the risk of violence in the camp.

Whitehead has been the scene of trouble for many months, but the situation is a bad lot worse again when more than 150 boat people escaped.

Last Friday, 1,200 police and 150 members of the army were sent to the camp.

The purpose of the operation was to clear the camp of those who were the most serious danger to the community.

Many of the boat people were frightened that the operation was the prelude to a mass deportation, a policy that has been criticised by Human Rights officials.

The UNHCR has taken a week to make an adjustment following detailed information from the boat people in Whitehead, the largest detention centre in the country.

**FACT SHEET**  
**Vietnamese Migrants in Hong Kong**

Along with other boat people, the 1,200 police and 150 members of the army were sent to the camp.

Year	Male	Female	Total
1975	1,000	500	1,500
1976	1,200	600	1,800
1977	1,500	750	2,250
1978	1,800	900	2,700
1979	2,000	1,000	3,000
1980	2,200	1,100	3,300
1981	2,400	1,200	3,600
1982	2,600	1,300	3,900
1983	2,800	1,400	4,200
1984	3,000	1,500	4,500
1985	3,200	1,600	4,800
1986	3,400	1,700	5,100
1987	3,600	1,800	5,400
1988	3,800	1,900	5,700
1989	4,000	2,000	6,000
1990	4,200	2,100	6,300
1991	4,400	2,200	6,600
1992	4,600	2,300	6,900
1993	4,800	2,400	7,200
1994	5,000	2,500	7,500
1995	5,200	2,600	7,800
1996	5,400	2,700	8,100
1997	5,600	2,800	8,400
1998	5,800	2,900	8,700
1999	6,000	3,000	9,000
2000	6,200	3,100	9,300
2001	6,400	3,200	9,600
2002	6,600	3,300	9,900
2003	6,800	3,400	10,200
2004	7,000	3,500	10,500
2005	7,200	3,600	10,800
2006	7,400	3,700	11,100
2007	7,600	3,800	11,400
2008	7,800	3,900	11,700
2009	8,000	4,000	12,000
2010	8,200	4,100	12,300
2011	8,400	4,200	12,600
2012	8,600	4,300	12,900
2013	8,800	4,400	13,200
2014	9,000	4,500	13,500
2015	9,200	4,600	13,800
2016	9,400	4,700	14,100
2017	9,600	4,800	14,400
2018	9,800	4,900	14,700
2019	10,000	5,000	15,000
2020	10,200	5,100	15,300
2021	10,400	5,200	15,600
2022	10,600	5,300	15,900
2023	10,800	5,400	16,200
2024	11,000	5,500	16,500
2025	11,200	5,600	16,800
2026	11,400	5,700	17,100
2027	11,600	5,800	17,400
2028	11,800	5,900	17,700
2029	12,000	6,000	18,000
2030	12,200	6,100	18,300

1-6-80

**Vietnamese refugee sentenced to death**  
 SCMP 1.6.80

A 34-year-old Vietnamese refugee was sentenced to death by a court in Hong Kong yesterday for the murder of a British man.

The court heard that the man, who was a member of the Viet Cong, was shot dead in a public place in Hong Kong in 1975.

The refugee, who was a member of the Viet Cong, was sentenced to death by a court in Hong Kong yesterday for the murder of a British man.

**Vets to fast until UNHCR meeting**  
 SCMP 1.7.78

Members of the Vietnam Veterans Association in Hong Kong are planning to fast until the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees meets with them.

The association, which has about 100 members, is protesting against the government's policy of sending boat people to detention camps.

The fast is expected to last for several days.

**Showing Viet youngsters the way to go home**  
 SCMP 2.8.78

A group of young Vietnamese refugees are being shown the way to go home by a group of Hong Kongers.

The group, which consists of about 20 young people, is being taken to a camp in Vietnam.

The Hong Kongers are providing them with food, clothing and other necessities.

**Vietnamese refugee opens fire during scuffle with policemen**  
 SCMP 1.7.78

A Vietnamese refugee opened fire during a scuffle with Hong Kong policemen yesterday.

The incident occurred in a public place in Hong Kong.

The refugee was shot in the leg and is being treated in a hospital.

**Violence at Whitehead 'terrifying'**  
 SCMP 1.7.78

By ANNA KERRICK  
 A VICTIM of violence at the Whitehead detention centre yesterday described the scene as "terrifying".

The victim, who was a member of the Viet Cong, was shot in the leg during the violence.

The violence occurred in a public place in Hong Kong.

**Officers prepare for worst**  
 SCMP 2.8.78

Security forces are preparing for the worst in the event of a riot at the Whitehead detention centre.

The forces, which include the Hong Kong Police and the British Army, are being alerted to the possibility of a riot.

The Whitehead detention centre is the largest detention centre in Hong Kong.

**Vietnam Airlines takes over boat people flights**  
 SCMP 2.8.78

Vietnam Airlines has taken over the flight of boat people from Hong Kong to Vietnam.

The airline, which is a state-owned enterprise, is providing the flights free of charge.

The flights are expected to start in the near future.

**Refugees held in dawn weapons raid on Hong Kong camp**  
 SCMP 2.8.78

Refugees were held in a dawn weapons raid on a camp in Hong Kong yesterday.

The raid was conducted by the Hong Kong Police and the British Army.

The camp, which is a detention centre, is located in a public place in Hong Kong.

**Compulsory repatriation hits snag - Manila talks inconclusive**  
 SCMP 2.8.78

Compulsory repatriation of Vietnamese refugees from Hong Kong has hit a snag because of inconclusive talks in Manila.

The talks, which were held between the United Kingdom and the Philippines, did not reach an agreement.

The United Kingdom is insisting on the repatriation of the refugees, while the Philippines is insisting on their right to asylum.

**And when they get back home?**  
 SCMP 2.8.78

As more Vietnamese refugees are sent back from Hong Kong, the question arises: what happens when they get back home?

The refugees, who are being sent back to Vietnam, are facing a uncertain future.

Many of the refugees are young people who have never been to Vietnam.



# Gallery



Artwork by refugees in Hong Kong



Photos of the Vietnamese boat people



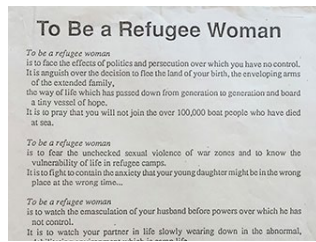
Scrapbooks



Unauthorised items made by refugees



Videos



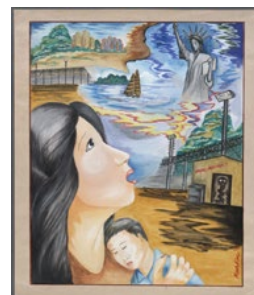
Refugee Literature

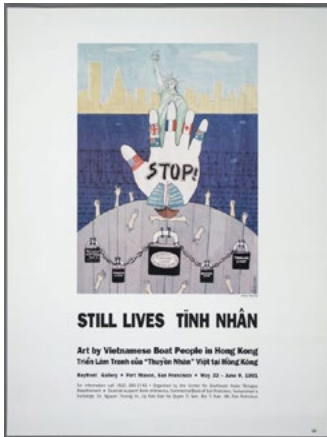
## Artwork by refugees in Hong Kong

Artworks by Vietnamese refugees and asylum seekers made during their detention in Hong Kong.

University of California, Irvine Libraries Collection

Source: *The Southeast Asian Archive at the University of California, Irvine Libraries*  
Special collections: *Paul Tran on Southeast Asian refugees and Project Ngoc records*









## Photos of the Vietnamese boat people













## Scrapbooks



Scrapbook 1



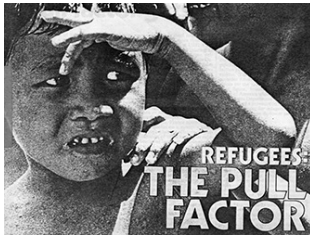
Scrapbook 2



Scrapbook 3



Scrapbook 4



Scrapbook 5



Scrapbook 6



About Cynthia Bashall



About Talbot Bashall







**Macao police stop more refugees**  
 40 boats, 1,157 refugees  
 Viet 'sevasion' goes on  
**2,100 boat refugees in two days**  
 Shipowner named



Table 1000	
Category	Count
1. Total	1,157
2. Male	600
3. Female	557
4. Children	100
5. Total	1,157
6. Male	600
7. Female	557
8. Children	100
9. Total	1,157
10. Male	600
11. Female	557
12. Children	100

**CONFIDENTIAL**

**CONFIDENTIAL**

**CONFIDENTIAL**

**Keyhole**  
**Number's up for Skyluck!**  
 353 more refugees  
**The skyluck's number is up**

**South China Morning Post**  
**Our man off to island refuge for Vietnamese?**  
**Refugee island shut up talks**  
**26 land in hospital**



**CONFIDENTIAL**

**CONFIDENTIAL**



**CONFIDENTIAL**

**CONFIDENTIAL**

**CONFIDENTIAL**

**Parcel ban hits Skyluck refugees**

By the time developments were announced with their families, the situation was in a state of confusion.

It is reported that the 300 or so refugees who were taken to Skyluck, including many women and children, were taken to the island in a small boat. The boat was damaged and the refugees were left to fend for themselves. The boat was damaged and the refugees were left to fend for themselves.

The boat was damaged and the refugees were left to fend for themselves.

**Parcel ban hits Skyluck refugees**

**Another 900 Viets on way**

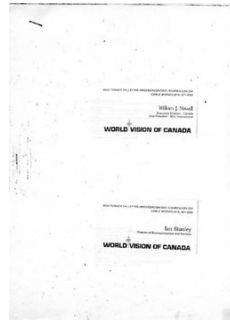
**A British ship picks them up**

The British ship, the *Argo*, has picked up another 900 Vietnamese refugees. The ship is carrying them to the United Kingdom. The ship is carrying them to the United Kingdom.

**Britain 'must' take 900**

**Ship will sail into probe**

The British ship, the *Argo*, is carrying 900 Vietnamese refugees. The ship is carrying them to the United Kingdom. The ship is carrying them to the United Kingdom.



A document with some text and a logo, possibly a letter or a report.

A document with some text and a logo, possibly a letter or a report.

**Refugee tide: thorn in side of ASEAN**

The influx of Vietnamese refugees has become a major problem for ASEAN. The influx of Vietnamese refugees has become a major problem for ASEAN.

**South China Morning Post**

**Refugee total soars by 3,000**

**Boat invasion keeps the police busy**

The number of Vietnamese refugees has increased by 3,000. The boat invasion keeps the police busy.

**It's time to put pressure on Hanoi, Britain told**

Britain has urged the United States to put pressure on Hanoi. Britain has urged the United States to put pressure on Hanoi.

**Thousands more are on the way**

**Sibonga 882 wait for London**

Thousands more Vietnamese refugees are on the way. The Sibonga 882 are waiting for London.

**Britain delays decision on Sibonga**

Britain has delayed its decision on the Sibonga 882. Britain has delayed its decision on the Sibonga 882.

**South China Morning Post**

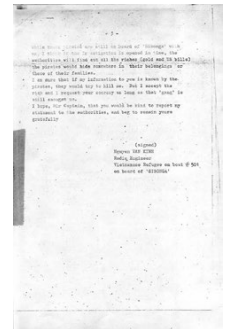
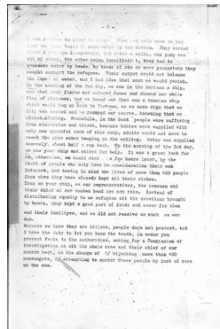
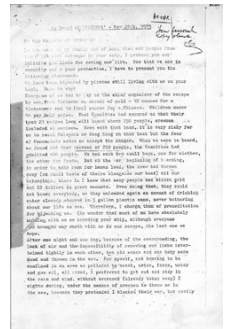
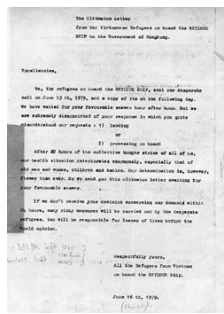
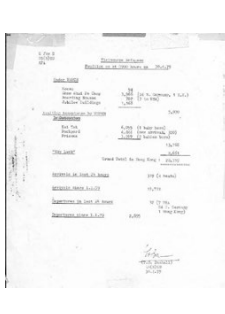
**Dead babies mark rescue drama at sea**

Dead babies mark a rescue drama at sea. Dead babies mark a rescue drama at sea.











**Sibonga 982 stay on board**

Sibonga 982 stay on board

**Roach Bank to be rejected**




Tung 1171

**Crack police squad to fight syndicates**

Refugees turned out

Claims aid fire safety

Syndicate report



**South China Morning Post**

**South China Morning Post**

**Tung An skipper to face court**



**Hanoi tightens screws on Chinese population**

**Southern Standard**



**Help us, pleads the 'Iron Lady'**

**\$125,000 a day for us to feed refugees**

Patrols wait for 'Sando' lighter

**Hongkong Standard**

Police closing in on runaway crew of Sen On

**INFORMATION**

UNCLASSIFIED

REFUGEE INFORMATION

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**UNCLASSIFIED**

REFUGEE INFORMATION

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**Mrs Thatcher has second thoughts after offer to boat people on board the Sibonga**

**BRITAIN VETOS MORE REFUGEES**



**China uses warship to bar refugees**

Anger against Hanoi mounts



**Armada of refugee boats heads for HK**

Squeeze on Govt. Dock yards to ease

**Refugee flood now tops 37,000**



**HEAT IS ON FOR REFUGEE RINGS**

Act before we're overrun by refugees



**Marine policeman at the eye of the refugee storm**



**South China Morning Post**

Sibonga to unload its human cargo today

500 move to Tuen Mun



**South China Morning Post**

500,000 due this year

On solid ground at last

Refugee ship crew on trial

Shipping companies urged to help



**UNCLASSIFIED**

REFUGEE INFORMATION

1. REFUGEE INFORMATION

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6. REFUGEE INFORMATION

7. REFUGEE INFORMATION

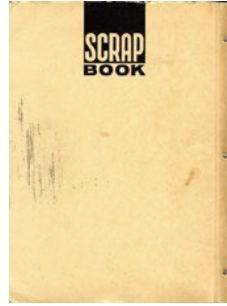
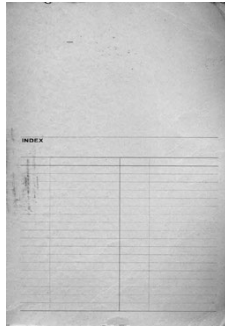
8. REFUGEE INFORMATION

9. REFUGEE INFORMATION

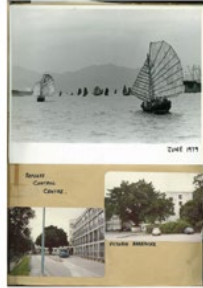
10. REFUGEE INFORMATION



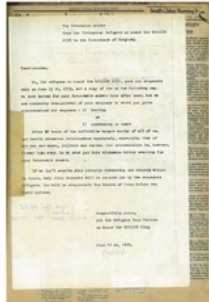




# Scrapbook 2







South China Morning Post  
HK has 2-year wait, he says

Refugees riot at Kai Tak

Realistic answer to refugee crisis

Pricking the world's conscience



Camp under fire

### RIOT FURY AT KAITAK CAMP

Refugee mistreatment claims win support

Challenges to riot refugee camp



'Skyluck' goes aground: Crew cuts the anchor

Special govt team begins probe on



radio: refugee ship runs aground on Lamma

Pilots belted as 'unchartered' freighter rams into island

### PROBE BEGINS ON SKYLUCK DRAMA



Six held after 'battle for Skyluck'

Teenage girl may lose arm



End of a nightmare for Skyluck refugees

refugee ship drama

Ship's skipper, crew held



South China morning Post

Lord Carrington urges the world to isolate Vietnam

A change of guard



Rioting refugees allege 'multreatment' by officials

London strengthens its vigilance



French international refugees finally land

First refugee baby doing fine

Italy may open door to refugees in Hongkong

Best people and their food

Chimawan crammed



Grounded ship may turn over

### VIETNAMESE HOLOCAUST

ONE MAN'S VIEW



Document page with text.

Document page with text.

Document page with text.

Document page with text.

South China Morning Post

No further U.S. aid to Vietnam

Vietnamese pass the 60,000 mark

First lot move in



36,200 meals a day from just one small kitchen

Lap Sap Chung landed here...

Address to the world

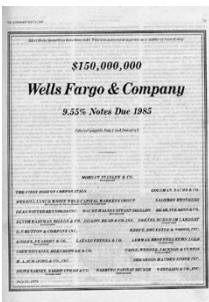
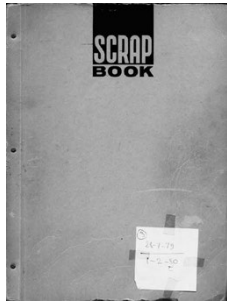








# Scrapbook 3





**No let-up in anti-refugee vigilance**

**Mystery of 'missing' boat people widens**

US delegation visits camp

**Congressmen staggered by plight of refugees**

US officials on refugee camps tour



**No entry signs hoisted for refugee freighter**

**Big bill fear 'launches' Ruddbank**

**Defiant still in hiding**



1981, 1982 - Administrative Personnel Listings

1981-1	A. B. BROWN, David A.	Director, Foreign Affairs Commission
1981-2	W. W. HARRIS, William A.	Staff Director of the United States on Resettlement of Refugees
1981-3	B. B. BROWN, Barbara	Staff Director, United States on Resettlement of Refugees
1981-4	J. J. JONES, Robert	Staff Director, United States on Resettlement of Refugees
1981-5	K. K. KIM, Robert	Staff Director, United States on Resettlement of Refugees
1981-6	L. L. LEE, Robert	Staff Director, United States on Resettlement of Refugees
1981-7	M. M. MURPHY, Robert	Staff Director, United States on Resettlement of Refugees
1981-8	N. N. NICHOLS, Robert	Staff Director, United States on Resettlement of Refugees
1981-9	O. O. O'NEILL, Robert	Staff Director, United States on Resettlement of Refugees
1981-10	P. P. PETERSON, Robert	Staff Director, United States on Resettlement of Refugees
1981-11	Q. Q. QUINN, Robert	Staff Director, United States on Resettlement of Refugees
1981-12	R. R. ROBERTS, Robert	Staff Director, United States on Resettlement of Refugees
1981-13	S. S. SMITH, Robert	Staff Director, United States on Resettlement of Refugees
1981-14	T. T. TAYLOR, Robert	Staff Director, United States on Resettlement of Refugees
1981-15	U. U. UNDERWOOD, Robert	Staff Director, United States on Resettlement of Refugees
1981-16	V. V. VAN DYKE, Robert	Staff Director, United States on Resettlement of Refugees
1981-17	W. W. WALKER, Robert	Staff Director, United States on Resettlement of Refugees
1981-18	X. X. XANTHOPOULOS, Robert	Staff Director, United States on Resettlement of Refugees
1981-19	Y. Y. YOUNG, Robert	Staff Director, United States on Resettlement of Refugees
1981-20	Z. Z. ZIMMERMAN, Robert	Staff Director, United States on Resettlement of Refugees

1981, 1982 - Administrative Personnel Listings

1981-21	A. A. ADAMS, Robert	Staff Director, United States on Resettlement of Refugees
1981-22	B. B. BAKER, Robert	Staff Director, United States on Resettlement of Refugees
1981-23	C. C. CAMPBELL, Robert	Staff Director, United States on Resettlement of Refugees
1981-24	D. D. DAVIS, Robert	Staff Director, United States on Resettlement of Refugees
1981-25	E. E. EVANS, Robert	Staff Director, United States on Resettlement of Refugees
1981-26	F. F. FOSTER, Robert	Staff Director, United States on Resettlement of Refugees
1981-27	G. G. GIBSON, Robert	Staff Director, United States on Resettlement of Refugees
1981-28	H. H. HARRIS, Robert	Staff Director, United States on Resettlement of Refugees
1981-29	I. I. IRVING, Robert	Staff Director, United States on Resettlement of Refugees
1981-30	J. J. JONES, Robert	Staff Director, United States on Resettlement of Refugees

**Europe 'is not doing enough'**

Land Irish are upset

**Defiant 10 still hunted**

An opportunity lost...



**Firm's motto stays 'Mercy before profit'**

**No to Canada**

Refugee charged with attacking prison officers



**80 left over to leave soon**

Refugee loses fingers in factory job - but he's still welcome in Canada

Clothing queue

DEFIANT REFUGEES WARNED, BUT TREAT IT AS A JOKE

**'Rude thanks'**

DEFIANT REFUGEES WARNED, BUT TREAT IT AS A JOKE

**A plea for the refugee children**

**SWEET AND SOUR**

BY WEI PAH TI



**Rogue refugees upset Canada**

**Huey Fong trio get 7 years' jail**

Shabbos refugees won't be punished

**THE 'MOVE OR BE MOVED' LAW**

**80 left over to leave soon**

Refugee loses fingers in factory job - but he's still welcome in Canada

Clothing queue

DEFIANT REFUGEES WARNED, BUT TREAT IT AS A JOKE

**'Rude thanks'**

DEFIANT REFUGEES WARNED, BUT TREAT IT AS A JOKE

**Visiting teachers learn from refugee children**



**Where refugees lose their smiles**

**Grumpy to jeer**

Resettlement rate picks up



**Where refugees lose their smiles**

**Grumpy to jeer**

Resettlement rate picks up



**'Ireland is desolate, and I'm not going...'**

**Pirates take a heavy toll of freedom seekers**

All Vietnamese refugees in HK will be resettled

**'ALL CLEAR' SIGN IN 18 MONTHS**

Refugee total now 68,651

**Journey of deceit leaves one man scot-free**



**Inside story of Vietnam exodus**

By [Name]

... [Text] ...



**Irish fiasco spotlights refugees' ignorance**

**Laying it on the line**

By [Name]

... [Text] ...

**Visiting MP calls at camp**

**MP vows to educate Europe on resettlement**

By [Name]

... [Text] ...

**RESTRICTED 内部文件**

... [Text] ...

**RESTRICTED 内部文件**

... [Text] ...

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**Refugees go to dockyard**

**Swap your refugees, Dutch urged**

By [Name]

... [Text] ...

**Security man gives some short answers on refugees**

**Strangers in strange lands**

By [Name]

... [Text] ...

**SHARP TELEGRAM**

NAME	...	...	...
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... [Text] ...

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**RESTRICTED**

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**Deaths claim 57 in just over two months at Tuensmum**

**HIGH DEATH TOLL IN REFUGEE CAMP**

**11 men Mun refugees in 25 criminal cases**

By [Name]

... [Text] ...















Clearing the air on refugee camps

MPs praise HK for refugee work




South China Morning Post

The year refugees embraced the child

Champ strikes a blow for refugees

Family bound for Tokyo




Ali moved by refugees

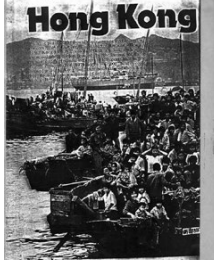
Japanese will visit HK

Skyluck captain waits for verdict




Hong Kong

China refugee airlift starts



Express!

62 Vietnamese sail in undetected



Refugees





Japan bids to fill 'vacancies'




Date set for new Vietnam exodus

Skyluck crew 'evil' — but freed



RESTRICTED 内部文件

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35. 1975-1976 (Total)	4,200
36. 1975-1976 (Total)	4,200
37. 1975-1976 (Total)	4,200
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58. 1975-1976 (Total)	4,200
59. 1975-1976 (Total)	4,200
60. 1975-1976 (Total)	4,200
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81. 1975-1976 (Total)	4,200
82. 1975-1976 (Total)	4,200
83. 1975-1976 (Total)	4,200
84. 1975-1976 (Total)	4,200
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88. 1975-1976 (Total)	4,200
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90. 1975-1976 (Total)	4,200
91. 1975-1976 (Total)	4,200
92. 1975-1976 (Total)	4,200
93. 1975-1976 (Total)	4,200
94. 1975-1976 (Total)	4,200
95. 1975-1976 (Total)	4,200
96. 1975-1976 (Total)	4,200
97. 1975-1976 (Total)	4,200
98. 1975-1976 (Total)	4,200
99. 1975-1976 (Total)	4,200
100. 1975-1976 (Total)	4,200

RESTRICTED 内部文件



Katzen and ID cards

Refugees arrive

China takes refugees back

China accepts boat people




RESTRICTED 内部文件

RESTRICTED 内部文件

RESTRICTED 内部文件




Conspiracy to defraud Philippines, not HK

SKYLUCK 5 GET OFF THE HOOK

Bills for refugee fares 'standard procedure'

Refugees headed for Germany



**RESTRICTED 内部文件**

CONFIDENTIAL

0201 Return required to 0201-1

0202 Return required to 0201-1

Item	Quantity	Unit Price	Total
1.0000	1000	1.00	1000.00
2.0000	2000	2.00	4000.00
3.0000	3000	3.00	9000.00
4.0000	4000	4.00	16000.00
5.0000	5000	5.00	25000.00
6.0000	6000	6.00	36000.00
7.0000	7000	7.00	49000.00
8.0000	8000	8.00	64000.00
9.0000	9000	9.00	81000.00
10.0000	10000	10.00	100000.00

**RESTRICTED 内部文件**

**RESTRICTED 内部文件**

CONFIDENTIAL

0201 Return required to 0201-1

0202 Return required to 0201-1

Item	Quantity	Unit Price	Total
1.0000	1000	1.00	1000.00
2.0000	2000	2.00	4000.00
3.0000	3000	3.00	9000.00
4.0000	4000	4.00	16000.00
5.0000	5000	5.00	25000.00
6.0000	6000	6.00	36000.00
7.0000	7000	7.00	49000.00
8.0000	8000	8.00	64000.00
9.0000	9000	9.00	81000.00
10.0000	10000	10.00	100000.00

**RESTRICTED 内部文件**

**Check and surprise follow report that Vietnamese told to pay for flight**

**REFUGEE FARE PROBE IN UK**

NEW HOME raises fears

**Boat people sent to China**

**Refugees set for voyage to Bataan**

**MOVE TO BATAAN CHOICE FOR 1,500**

Refugees fear life in new Philippine camp

**RESTRICTED 内部文件**

CONFIDENTIAL

0201 Return required to 0201-1

0202 Return required to 0201-1

Item	Quantity	Unit Price	Total
1.0000	1000	1.00	1000.00
2.0000	2000	2.00	4000.00
3.0000	3000	3.00	9000.00
4.0000	4000	4.00	16000.00
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8.0000	8000	8.00	64000.00
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**RESTRICTED 内部文件**

**RESTRICTED 内部文件**

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3.0000	3000	3.00	9000.00
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6.0000	6000	6.00	36000.00
7.0000	7000	7.00	49000.00
8.0000	8000	8.00	64000.00
9.0000	9000	9.00	81000.00
10.0000	10000	10.00	100000.00

**RESTRICTED 内部文件**

**The boat people sail into Hong Kong**

**Refugees find a new home**

**CONFIDENTIAL 秘密**

0201 Return required to 0201-1

0202 Return required to 0201-1

0203 Return required to 0201-1

0204 Return required to 0201-1

0205 Return required to 0201-1

0206 Return required to 0201-1

0207 Return required to 0201-1

0208 Return required to 0201-1

0209 Return required to 0201-1

0210 Return required to 0201-1

**CONFIDENTIAL 秘密**

**CONFIDENTIAL 秘密**

0201 Return required to 0201-1

0202 Return required to 0201-1

0203 Return required to 0201-1

0204 Return required to 0201-1

0205 Return required to 0201-1

0206 Return required to 0201-1

0207 Return required to 0201-1

0208 Return required to 0201-1

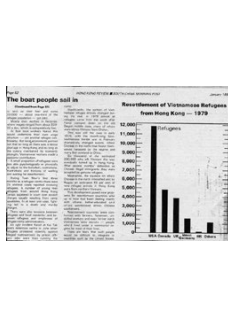
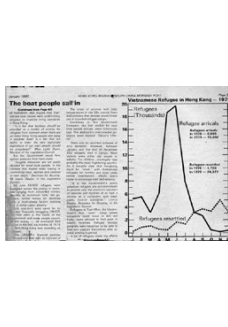
0209 Return required to 0201-1

0210 Return required to 0201-1

**CONFIDENTIAL 秘密**

**Turning points in the refugee saga**

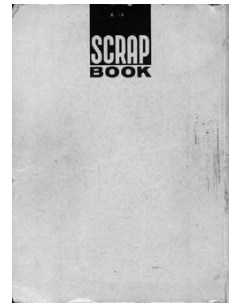
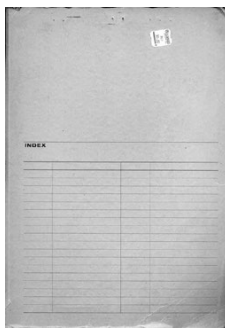
**Turning points in the refugee saga**



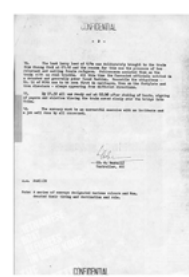
**The boat people sail in**

**The boat people sail in**





# Scrapbook 4











Handwritten document, possibly a letter or report, with dense text.

Handwritten document, possibly a letter or report, with dense text.

Handwritten document, possibly a letter or report, with dense text.

Handwritten document, possibly a letter or report, with dense text.

**Vietnamese act Batuan assurance helps in gold**  
**Elderly refug**  
**ees have high TB rate**

**Huey Fong case. Two win appeal**  
**TWO HUE 'BRAINS' Y FONG FREED**  
**2 win Huey Fong appeal**

Handwritten document, possibly a letter or report, with dense text.

Handwritten document, possibly a letter or report, with dense text.

Handwritten document, possibly a letter or report, with dense text.

Handwritten document, possibly a letter or report, with dense text.

Handwritten document, possibly a letter or report, with dense text.

**hey find a new life on our shores**  
Handwritten document, possibly a letter or report, with dense text.

**A healthy outlook from inside refugee camps**  
**Huey Fong trio lose appeal bid**

Handwritten document, possibly a letter or report, with dense text.

Handwritten document, possibly a letter or report, with dense text.

Handwritten document, possibly a letter or report, with dense text.





The dining room at one of the two refugee buildings near the... (text is partially obscured)

RESTRICTED FORM  
A form with various fields and checkboxes, likely a processing document for refugees. It includes sections for 'PERSONAL INFORMATION' and 'STATUS INFORMATION'.

RESTRICTED FORM  
A form with various fields and checkboxes, similar to the previous one. It includes sections for 'PERSONAL INFORMATION' and 'STATUS INFORMATION'.

RESTRICTED FORM  
A form with various fields and checkboxes, similar to the previous ones. It includes sections for 'PERSONAL INFORMATION' and 'STATUS INFORMATION'.



CONFIDENTIAL FORM  
A form with various fields and checkboxes, marked as 'CONFIDENTIAL'. It includes sections for 'PERSONAL INFORMATION' and 'STATUS INFORMATION'.

CONFIDENTIAL FORM  
A form with various fields and checkboxes, marked as 'CONFIDENTIAL'. It includes sections for 'PERSONAL INFORMATION' and 'STATUS INFORMATION'.

CONFIDENTIAL FORM  
A form with various fields and checkboxes, marked as 'CONFIDENTIAL'. It includes sections for 'PERSONAL INFORMATION' and 'STATUS INFORMATION'.



RESTRICTED FORM  
A form with various fields and checkboxes, marked as 'RESTRICTED'. It includes sections for 'PERSONAL INFORMATION' and 'STATUS INFORMATION'.



RESTRICTED

CLASS	DATE	TIME	STATUS
1	10/10/72	10:00	OK
2	10/10/72	11:00	OK
3	10/10/72	12:00	OK
4	10/10/72	13:00	OK
5	10/10/72	14:00	OK
6	10/10/72	15:00	OK
7	10/10/72	16:00	OK
8	10/10/72	17:00	OK
9	10/10/72	18:00	OK
10	10/10/72	19:00	OK
11	10/10/72	20:00	OK
12	10/10/72	21:00	OK
13	10/10/72	22:00	OK
14	10/10/72	23:00	OK

RESTRICTED

RESTRICTED

10/10/72

10:00

11:00

12:00

13:00

14:00

15:00

16:00

17:00

18:00

19:00

20:00

21:00

22:00

23:00

RESTRICTED

Canada lends our aid for refugees



Immigration policy seeks to reunify families

Refugees need more English

Refugees hold meal protest

Another 27 Viet refugees left

Sailing into UK

Refugees slip past patrols

RESTRICTED

10/10/72

10:00

11:00

12:00

13:00

14:00

15:00

16:00

17:00

18:00

19:00

20:00

21:00

22:00

23:00

RESTRICTED

RESTRICTED

10/10/72

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22:00

23:00

RESTRICTED

RESTRICTED

CLASS	DATE	TIME	STATUS
1	10/10/72	10:00	OK
2	10/10/72	11:00	OK
3	10/10/72	12:00	OK
4	10/10/72	13:00	OK
5	10/10/72	14:00	OK
6	10/10/72	15:00	OK
7	10/10/72	16:00	OK
8	10/10/72	17:00	OK
9	10/10/72	18:00	OK
10	10/10/72	19:00	OK
11	10/10/72	20:00	OK
12	10/10/72	21:00	OK
13	10/10/72	22:00	OK
14	10/10/72	23:00	OK

RESTRICTED

Refugee life down on the farm



Gales prompt evacuation

Refugee woes get an airing

No end to surging tide of humanity



Viet refugee food gives aid

RESTRICTED

CLASS	DATE	TIME	STATUS
1	10/10/72	10:00	OK
2	10/10/72	11:00	OK
3	10/10/72	12:00	OK
4	10/10/72	13:00	OK
5	10/10/72	14:00	OK
6	10/10/72	15:00	OK
7	10/10/72	16:00	OK
8	10/10/72	17:00	OK
9	10/10/72	18:00	OK
10	10/10/72	19:00	OK
11	10/10/72	20:00	OK
12	10/10/72	21:00	OK
13	10/10/72	22:00	OK
14	10/10/72	23:00	OK

RESTRICTED

RESTRICTED

CLASS	DATE	TIME	STATUS
1	10/10/72	10:00	OK
2	10/10/72	11:00	OK
3	10/10/72	12:00	OK
4	10/10/72	13:00	OK
5	10/10/72	14:00	OK
6	10/10/72	15:00	OK
7	10/10/72	16:00	OK
8	10/10/72	17:00	OK
9	10/10/72	18:00	OK
10	10/10/72	19:00	OK
11	10/10/72	20:00	OK
12	10/10/72	21:00	OK
13	10/10/72	22:00	OK
14	10/10/72	23:00	OK

RESTRICTED

WHILE YOU WERE OUT

10/10/72

RESTRICTED

Refugee problem - source of instability under scrutiny



he lost

Camp puts on a brighter face after improvements



he lost

CONFIDENTIAL

10/10/72

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

10/10/72

CONFIDENTIAL

**Family ties force refugees to remain**  
More refugees urged for UK

Refugees could find...  
Medical care for refugees boosted

Japanese team checks Viets



**Refugees urged to stay in UK**

The Refugee Commission in London...  
Refugees urged to stay in UK



1977 MONTHLY SUMMARY OF REFUGEE ARRIVALS IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

Month	From Vietnam	From Other Countries	Total
Jan	1,200	100	1,300
Feb	1,100	120	1,220
Mar	1,300	150	1,450
Apr	1,400	180	1,580
May	1,500	200	1,700
Jun	1,600	220	1,820
Jul	1,700	250	1,950
Aug	1,800	280	2,080
Sep	1,900	300	2,200
Oct	2,000	320	2,320
Nov	2,100	350	2,450
Dec	2,200	380	2,580

1977 MONTHLY SUMMARY OF REFUGEE ARRIVALS IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

Month	From Vietnam	From Other Countries	Total
Jan	1,200	100	1,300
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May	1,500	200	1,700
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Jul	1,700	250	1,950
Aug	1,800	280	2,080
Sep	1,900	300	2,200
Oct	2,000	320	2,320
Nov	2,100	350	2,450
Dec	2,200	380	2,580

**NO JOY, NO TEARS. AT THE END OF A NIGHTMARE**

Refugees...  
Zimbabwe...  
Zimbabwe...  
Zimbabwe...



**Hanoi's Red spy network**

America...  
Hanoi's Red spy network...  
Hanoi's Red spy network...



1977 MONTHLY SUMMARY OF REFUGEE ARRIVALS IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

1977 MONTHLY SUMMARY OF REFUGEE ARRIVALS IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

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1977 MONTHLY SUMMARY OF REFUGEE ARRIVALS IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

**It's magic -2,700 fly out**

America cuts down on refugee quota

Refugees in gear fight



**Tony's journey to beyond—and back**

Viet refugee arrival rate falls

Refugee intake won't be cut—US



1977 MONTHLY SUMMARY OF REFUGEE ARRIVALS IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

1977 MONTHLY SUMMARY OF REFUGEE ARRIVALS IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

RESTRICTED

Category	Value
100	1,000
200	2,000
300	3,000
400	4,000
500	5,000
600	6,000
700	7,000
800	8,000
900	9,000
1,000	10,000
1,100	11,000
1,200	12,000
1,300	13,000
1,400	14,000
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2,000	20,000
2,100	21,000
2,200	22,000
2,300	23,000
2,400	24,000
2,500	25,000
2,600	26,000
2,700	27,000
2,800	28,000
2,900	29,000
3,000	30,000
3,100	31,000
3,200	32,000
3,300	33,000
3,400	34,000
3,500	35,000
3,600	36,000
3,700	37,000
3,800	38,000
3,900	39,000
4,000	40,000
4,100	41,000
4,200	42,000
4,300	43,000
4,400	44,000
4,500	45,000
4,600	46,000
4,700	47,000
4,800	48,000
4,900	49,000
5,000	50,000

RESTRICTED 内部文件

Category	Value
100	1,000
200	2,000
300	3,000
400	4,000
500	5,000
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1,000	10,000
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4,600	46,000
4,700	47,000
4,800	48,000
4,900	49,000
5,000	50,000

RESTRICTED 内部文件

Dear Sir,

I am pleased to hear that you are interested in the services of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

The UNHCR is a humanitarian organization that provides protection and assistance to refugees, internally displaced persons, and stateless persons.

If you would like to learn more about our work, please contact our office at the address below.

Yours faithfully,

*[Signature]*



RESTRICTED 内部文件

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If you would like to learn more about our work, please contact our office at the address below.

Yours faithfully,

*[Signature]*



**URGENT**

Dear Sir,

I am pleased to hear that you are interested in the services of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

The UNHCR is a humanitarian organization that provides protection and assistance to refugees, internally displaced persons, and stateless persons.

If you would like to learn more about our work, please contact our office at the address below.

Yours faithfully,

*[Signature]*



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Category	Value
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200	2,000
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900	9,000
1,000	10,000
1,100	11,000
1,200	12,000
1,300	13,000
1,400	14,000
1,500	15,000
1,600	16,000
1,700	17,000
1,800	18,000
1,900	19,000
2,000	20,000
2,100	21,000
2,200	22,000
2,300	23,000
2,400	24,000
2,500	25,000
2,600	26,000
2,700	27,000
2,800	28,000
2,900	29,000
3,000	30,000
3,100	31,000
3,200	32,000
3,300	33,000
3,400	34,000
3,500	35,000
3,600	36,000
3,700	37,000
3,800	38,000
3,900	39,000
4,000	40,000
4,100	41,000
4,200	42,000
4,300	43,000
4,400	44,000
4,500	45,000
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4,700	47,000
4,800	48,000
4,900	49,000
5,000	50,000

RESTRICTED 内部文件

RESTRICTED 内部文件

Category	Value
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1,000	10,000
1,100	11,000
1,200	12,000
1,300	13,000
1,400	14,000
1,500	15,000
1,600	16,000
1,700	17,000
1,800	18,000
1,900	19,000
2,000	20,000
2,100	21,000
2,200	22,000
2,300	23,000
2,400	24,000
2,500	25,000
2,600	26,000
2,700	27,000
2,800	28,000
2,900	29,000
3,000	30,000
3,100	31,000
3,200	32,000
3,300	33,000
3,400	34,000
3,500	35,000
3,600	36,000
3,700	37,000
3,800	38,000
3,900	39,000
4,000	40,000
4,100	41,000
4,200	42,000
4,300	43,000
4,400	44,000
4,500	45,000
4,600	46,000
4,700	47,000
4,800	48,000
4,900	49,000
5,000	50,000

RESTRICTED 内部文件



LEADER COMMUNIST PARTY... (Text of a political document or speech)

LEADER COMMUNIST PARTY... (Text of a political document or speech)

LEADER COMMUNIST PARTY... (Text of a political document or speech)

A communications gap... Boat people crisis 'under control'... UK refugee plea... For the refugees—a taste of Christmas away from home

South China Morning Post... A very UN helpful organization... Beginning of the end to the boat people problem

18 December 1980... (Official letter or document)



Annual Hangings... Learning the Season's Magic... A mystery unfolds for the boat people

Annual Hangings... (Photographs and text about hangings)

Camp job proved a big challenge... (Photographs and text about camp work)

(Official document or letter)

Hunt for Viet refugee's killers... The hard times persist in Vietnam... second batch of Viet refugees calls in... Fight ends in slaughter

Sad Ho looks at happiness... Viet food crisis is causing starvation, say refugees

All the West is doing is buying time... (Text and map about refugee flows)

The Colony... Light at the end of tunnel... Boat people problem may fade this year

SCRAP BOOK

# Scrapbook 5



RESTRICTED 内文  
[Text of a document, possibly a report or memo, with some illegible content.]

RESTRICTED 内文  
[Text of a document, possibly a report or memo, with some illegible content.]

RESTRICTED 内文

Category	Value
...	...
...	...
...	...

RESTRICTED 内文

continue to close  
Fresh palmers  
on refugee status  
Food crisis  
likely to fan  
Viet food

New refugee influx  
Viet may get second chance  
Plan to reunite Viet families

New refugee influx  
Viet may get second chance  
Plan to reunite Viet families

RESTRICTED 内文

Category	Value
...	...
...	...
...	...

RESTRICTED 内文

RESTRICTED 内文

Category	Value
...	...
...	...
...	...

RESTRICTED 内文

Familiar scene - 35 years ago  
Vets 'willing to leave'  
Bid to resettle refugees with criminal records

Refugee food 'on way here'

RESTRICTED 内文

Category	Value
...	...
...	...
...	...

RESTRICTED 内文

Sad, familiar evodus starts again  
Verminous  
bring TB bac

Refugee influx inc  
fear of bubonic pla  
Guiding his spark a durry

RESTRICTED 内文

Category	Value
...	...
...	...
...	...

RESTRICTED 内文

RESTRICTED  
[Text of a document, possibly a report or memo, with some illegible content.]





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Police grab 164 illegals  
The first known to a burger. Quake hysteria. Miss Viet was orchestrated.

More set to flee say Viet refugees  
Identity snags halt repatriation

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RESTRICTED AREA

RESTRICTED AREA

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Quake broadest wasn't our voice  
Ship brings in 63 refugees

Three shot dead on junk  
Shortage of funds hits SA refugee work  
UN slashes Viet boat-people aid

NOTE  
FROM: David A. ...  
SUBJECT: ...

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Stress is taking toll of Viet refugees—survey  
Royal appeal over refugees

Tougher line on refugees  
Boat people keen coming

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Blank page with faint text.

Blank page with faint text.

RESTRICTED AIRBORNE

NAME	...
...	...
...	...
...	...

RESTRICTED AIRBORNE

RESTRICTED AIRBORNE

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RESTRICTED AIRBORNE

...



### Viet jail horror for captured refugees

Refugee More ...  
Viet flood ends hopes of ...  
atback

### Japan to take more refugees

### Hong Kong features

...

...

...

...

...

...

RESTRICTED AIRBORNE

...	...
...	...
...	...

RESTRICTED AIRBORNE

CONFIDENTIAL

...

The Change of Status of the ...  
...







**RESTRICTED**

COMMUNICATIONS SECTION  
 (CLASSIFICATION: UNCLASSIFIED)

TO: [Redacted]  
 FROM: [Redacted]  
 SUBJECT: [Redacted]

**RESTRICTED**

**RESTRICTED**

COMMUNICATIONS SECTION  
 (CLASSIFICATION: UNCLASSIFIED)

TO: [Redacted]  
 FROM: [Redacted]  
 SUBJECT: [Redacted]

**RESTRICTED**



**RESTRICTED**

COMMUNICATIONS SECTION  
 (CLASSIFICATION: UNCLASSIFIED)

TO: [Redacted]  
 FROM: [Redacted]  
 SUBJECT: [Redacted]

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**RESTRICTED 内文件**

COMMUNICATIONS SECTION  
 (CLASSIFICATION: UNCLASSIFIED)

TO: [Redacted]  
 FROM: [Redacted]  
 SUBJECT: [Redacted]

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**RESTRICTED 内文件**

COMMUNICATIONS SECTION  
 (CLASSIFICATION: UNCLASSIFIED)

TO: [Redacted]  
 FROM: [Redacted]  
 SUBJECT: [Redacted]

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**RESTRICTED**

COMMUNICATIONS SECTION  
 (CLASSIFICATION: UNCLASSIFIED)

TO: [Redacted]  
 FROM: [Redacted]  
 SUBJECT: [Redacted]

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COMMUNICATIONS SECTION  
 (CLASSIFICATION: UNCLASSIFIED)

TO: [Redacted]  
 FROM: [Redacted]  
 SUBJECT: [Redacted]

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**RESTRICTED 内文件**

COMMUNICATIONS SECTION  
 (CLASSIFICATION: UNCLASSIFIED)

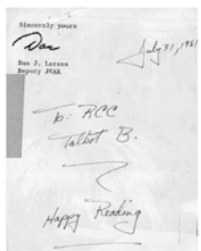
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 FROM: [Redacted]  
 SUBJECT: [Redacted]

**RESTRICTED 内文件**

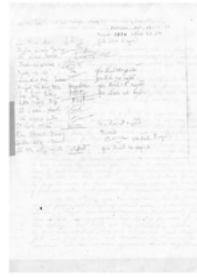
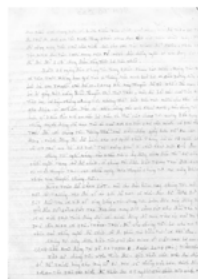
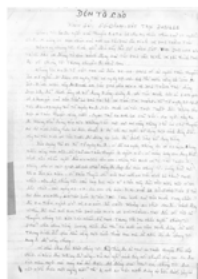












Handwritten text in Vietnamese, likely a letter or report, with some underlined words.

Handwritten text in Vietnamese, continuing the narrative or report.

Handwritten text in Vietnamese, possibly a different section or a separate document.

Handwritten text on a document with a header that reads 'ON THE MARITIME SERVICE...'

News article titled 'Viet children suffer "Brits first" policy' and 'Two Vets go home'. Includes a photo of a child.

News article titled 'Refugee chief praises China' and 'Shrimpers up in arms over Vets'. Includes a photo of a boat.

Table titled 'RESTRICTED' with columns for various categories and numerical data.

Table titled 'RESTRICTED' with columns for various categories and numerical data.

News article titled 'The more flexible plans by refugee chief' and 'From Vietnam, a Camb-22 in Manila'. Includes a photo of people.

News article titled 'A Vietnamese Orphan Tries to Kill His Adoptive Mother' and 'Children hit in HK camps'. Includes a photo of a child.

Table titled 'RESTRICTED' with columns for various categories and numerical data.

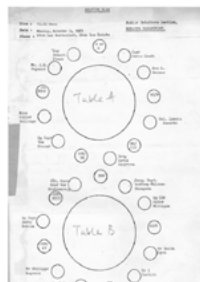
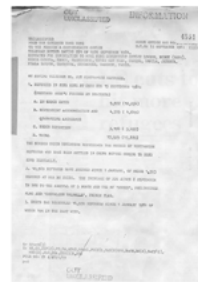
Table titled 'RESTRICTED' with columns for various categories and numerical data.

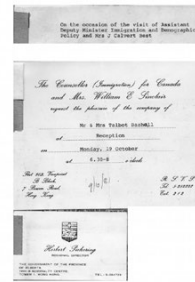
Table titled 'RESTRICTED' with columns for various categories and numerical data.

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Table titled 'RESTRICTED' with columns for various categories and numerical data.

News article titled 'Loss of 1100 Lives Vietnamese to Drown the Sea' and 'Prison camp wait for some refugees'. Includes a photo of people.



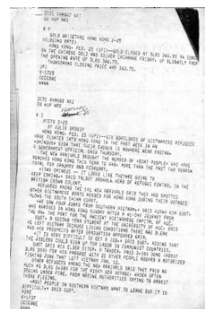




# Scrapbook 6



No.	Name	Address	Phone No.
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20			



**RESTRICTED 内部文件**

1972 Report/Reportage of Refugee Resettlement Statistics

Period	Arrivals	Deaths	Resettled	Returned	Other
1/1/72 to 3/31/72	82,267	8,513	25,271	3,301	45,182
1/1/72 to 12/31/72	82,267	8,513	25,271	3,301	45,182

1973 Report/Reportage of Refugee Resettlement Statistics

Period	Arrivals	Deaths	Resettled	Returned	Other
1/1/73 to 3/31/73	82,267	8,513	25,271	3,301	45,182
1/1/73 to 12/31/73	82,267	8,513	25,271	3,301	45,182

1974 Report/Reportage of Refugee Resettlement Statistics

Period	Arrivals	Deaths	Resettled	Returned	Other
1/1/74 to 3/31/74	82,267	8,513	25,271	3,301	45,182
1/1/74 to 12/31/74	82,267	8,513	25,271	3,301	45,182

**RESTRICTED 内部文件**



July 19, 1972 - 1st Pacific Airways Co. flight  
from Saigon - Saigon

Mr. Bashell,

Quite a nice picture,  
Right?  
The pig is a real  
disappointment from the picture.

Sincerely yours,  
Steve  
Seagrove  
1972

**No reason for any refugee flood**

**Chartered jumbo to a new world of dreams**

Four of new Viet lifts

No 50,000 left off to France

Refugee strikers make their point

Final fling at refugee camp

**Viets 'ask' to be turned away**

Refugee group steps up war on pirates

US couple's Lunar New Year wish

UK urged to take more boat people

Eight Viet refugees in big bank

**The Colony**

**Delay in resettlement**

Refugee strikers make their point

To mark the 20th Anniversary of the Establishment of the Hong Kong Regional Office of the International Committee for Migration the Regional Representative requests the pleasure of the company of

Mr. T. Bashell  
at a Reception on Monday, 1 February 1972  
at the Labor Reception Club, 45 Colindale Avenue

R. V. T. B. 2.427617

Refugee strikers make their point

Final fling at refugee camp

**Boat people intake slashed**

Refugees take up illegal employment

Soviets woo Vietnamese youngsters

Viet arrivals hit 2-year high

JOINT VOLUNTARY AGENCY OFFICE

7 February 1972

Dear Mr. Bashell,

I am pleased to inform you that the Joint Voluntary Agency Office has received your letter of the 27th January 1972 regarding the proposed visit to Hong Kong of the Hon. Mr. T. Bashell, Director of the Hong Kong Regional Office of the International Committee for Migration.

The Office is pleased to inform you that the proposed visit is being arranged and that the Hon. Mr. T. Bashell will be accompanied by a representative of the Office.

The Office is also pleased to inform you that the proposed visit is being arranged and that the Hon. Mr. T. Bashell will be accompanied by a representative of the Office.

Yours faithfully,  
Mr. T. Bashell

To Mr. T. Bashell, Director of the Hong Kong Regional Office of the International Committee for Migration, at a Reception on Monday, 1 February 1972, at the Labor Reception Club, 45 Colindale Avenue.

Mr. T. Bashell

at a reception on Tuesday February 1st 1972 at the Labor Reception Club, 45 Colindale Avenue

R. V. T. B. 2.427617

**Refugees**

By MARSHALL BROWNSON in Orange County

**busily reshaping lives**

VIETNAMESE RESTAURANT

Refugee center built

2,000 Viet illegals to be sent back

**Pirate attacks still a problem**

First batch for China today

Taking a stand on pirate attacks against refugees

**RESTRICTED 内部文件**

1972 Report/Reportage of Refugee Resettlement Statistics

Period	Arrivals	Deaths	Resettled	Returned	Other
1/1/72 to 3/31/72	82,267	8,513	25,271	3,301	45,182
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**RESTRICTED 内部文件**

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1973 Report/Reportage of Refugee Resettlement Statistics

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1/1/73 to 12/31/73	82,267	8,513	25,271	3,301	45,182

**RESTRICTED 内部文件**



190/82  
 FRONTIER CONTROL AREA PERMIT N° 382197  
 邊境管制區許可證 N° 382197  
 1. 姓名: NGUYEN VAN THUAN  
 2. 職業: Teacher  
 3. 地址: Hanoi  
 4. 有效期: 9 months  
 5. 簽名: [Signature]

**It's time to re-think on refugees**

**This Week**  
 - KEVIN DOUGLAS

**US 'to tighten up on refugees'** Refugee hawks spark more police patrols



**South China Morning Post**  
 Finding homes for returned refugees

**Refugees to be 'freed'**

**Refugees' homelind moves to Bangkok**



**RESTRICTED INFORMATION**

RESTRICTED

FOR U.S. EYES ONLY, EXCEPT POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, CODE WORDS

1. I-1 REFUGEE A-08 10/10/77  
 2. I-1 REFUGEE A-08 10/10/77

RESTRICTED

1. 姓名: NGUYEN VAN THUAN  
 2. 職業: Teacher  
 3. 地址: Hanoi  
 4. 有效期: 9 months  
 5. 簽名: [Signature]

**RESTRICTED 内部文件**

1. 姓名: NGUYEN VAN THUAN  
 2. 職業: Teacher  
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 5. 簽名: [Signature]

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1. 姓名: NGUYEN VAN THUAN  
 2. 職業: Teacher  
 3. 地址: Hanoi  
 4. 有效期: 9 months  
 5. 簽名: [Signature]

**RESTRICTED 内部文件**

1. 姓名: NGUYEN VAN THUAN  
 2. 職業: Teacher  
 3. 地址: Hanoi  
 4. 有效期: 9 months  
 5. 簽名: [Signature]

**RESTRICTED 内部文件**

Category	Value	Unit
1. 姓名	NGUYEN VAN THUAN	
2. 職業	Teacher	
3. 地址	Hanoi	
4. 有效期	9 months	
5. 簽名	[Signature]	

**RESTRICTED 内部文件**

Category	Value	Unit
1. 姓名	NGUYEN VAN THUAN	
2. 職業	Teacher	
3. 地址	Hanoi	
4. 有效期	9 months	
5. 簽名	[Signature]	

**Australia tightens up screening on refugees**

**Faction fight at East Timor**



**Pirates' row stalls refugee resettlement bid**

**Warning for boat-people**



**RESTRICTED 内部文件**

1. 姓名: NGUYEN VAN THUAN  
 2. 職業: Teacher  
 3. 地址: Hanoi  
 4. 有效期: 9 months  
 5. 簽名: [Signature]

**RESTRICTED 内部文件**

1. 姓名: NGUYEN VAN THUAN  
 2. 職業: Teacher  
 3. 地址: Hanoi  
 4. 有效期: 9 months  
 5. 簽名: [Signature]

**Refugees rejoin freedom queue**

**'Hitch' landed 500 in detention**



**The Ping-Pong Refugees**

**Six-day high influx of Viet refugees**



SECRET  
 CONFIDENTIAL  
 1. The first step of the 24 and 25th...  
 2. The second step of the 24 and 25th...  
 3. The third step of the 24 and 25th...

SECRET  
 CONFIDENTIAL  
 1. The first step of the 24 and 25th...  
 2. The second step of the 24 and 25th...  
 3. The third step of the 24 and 25th...

SECRET  
 CONFIDENTIAL  
 1. The first step of the 24 and 25th...  
 2. The second step of the 24 and 25th...  
 3. The third step of the 24 and 25th...

SECRET  
 CONFIDENTIAL  
 1. The first step of the 24 and 25th...  
 2. The second step of the 24 and 25th...  
 3. The third step of the 24 and 25th...

**A baby waits for a new life**

**Weed out refugee hoochums official**

**Refugees will have to prove 'US link'**



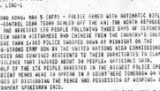
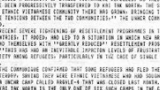

**Bloody clashes in Kaitak camp**

**Thailand closed camps on the cards**




**5 policemen, 15 others hurt in refugee riot**

**Refugees must move**

**Crackdown on trouble-makers**




**RESTRICTED 内部文件**

Category	Value
1. The first step of the 24 and 25th...	100
2. The second step of the 24 and 25th...	200
3. The third step of the 24 and 25th...	300

**RESTRICTED 内部文件**

Category	Value
1. The first step of the 24 and 25th...	100
2. The second step of the 24 and 25th...	200
3. The third step of the 24 and 25th...	300

SECRET  
 CONFIDENTIAL  
 1. The first step of the 24 and 25th...  
 2. The second step of the 24 and 25th...  
 3. The third step of the 24 and 25th...

SECRET  
 CONFIDENTIAL  
 1. The first step of the 24 and 25th...  
 2. The second step of the 24 and 25th...  
 3. The third step of the 24 and 25th...

**Camp quiet after 176 arrests**

**Viet girl describes rape ordeal**




**Welfare against splitting**

**Viet refugee families**




SECRET  
 CONFIDENTIAL  
 1. The first step of the 24 and 25th...  
 2. The second step of the 24 and 25th...  
 3. The third step of the 24 and 25th...





CONFIDENTIAL
The first of these is that the...
The second is that the...
The third is that the...

RESTRICTED 内部文件
Table with columns: Period, Amount, Balance, etc.
Includes sub-tables for '1970' and '1971'.

RESTRICTED 内部文件
Table with columns: Period, Amount, Balance, etc.
Includes sub-tables for '1970' and '1971'.

CONFIDENTIAL
INFORMATION
CONFIDENTIAL
The first of these is that the...
The second is that the...
The third is that the...

CONFIDENTIAL
The first of these is that the...
The second is that the...
The third is that the...

\$100m bill for refugee camps
Thank God for the...
Widened opinion from McMillan
State Affair

Writer in search of a war
Close slaves with death can't kill
Clare's enthusiasm
Legco to vote on closed camps

Table with columns: Period, Amount, Balance, etc.
Includes sub-tables for '1970' and '1971'.

RESTRICTED 内部文件
Table with columns: Period, Amount, Balance, etc.
Includes sub-tables for '1970' and '1971'.

CONFIDENTIAL
The first of these is that the...
The second is that the...
The third is that the...

CONFIDENTIAL
The first of these is that the...
The second is that the...
The third is that the...

CONFIDENTIAL
The first of these is that the...
The second is that the...
The third is that the...

CONFIDENTIAL
The first of these is that the...
The second is that the...
The third is that the...

To my Excellency Mr. S. H. McMillan and Mr. S. H. Campbell
The Honorable (Members) for Canada and Mrs. William E. Finlayson
at the pleasure of the company of Mr. & Mrs. Walcott Marshall
Buffet dinner
Tuesday, 22 June
at 7.30 o'clock

CONFIDENTIAL
The first of these is that the...
The second is that the...
The third is that the...

Viets jailed for 'abuse of hospitality'
Forgotten people' Britain welcomed from Vietnam
Madness allied for that

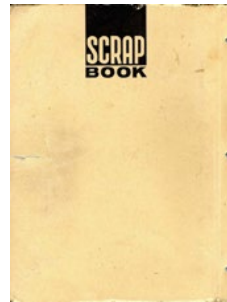
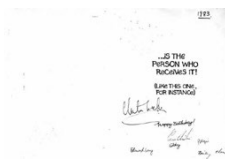
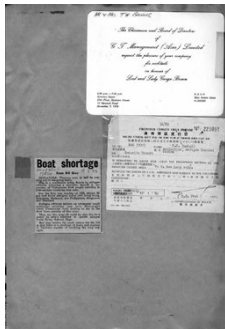












## About Cynthia Bashall

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### Cynthia Glegge Bashall 1924–2011

Cynthia was born on 24 September 1924 on the Wirral in the North of England; there were five children in her family. At the outbreak of Hitler's War in September 1939, Cynthia was to be 15 years of age. Hitler's planned invasion of England did not take place due to the Battle of Britain, which appeared to have a deterrent effect! However, daylight Luftwaffe bombings were replaced by night attacks, so Cynthia and others were kept busy round the clock.

Cynthia's interest in horticulture was insatiable. At age 16 she worked on the Estate of The Earl of Iveagh ('boss' of the Guinness Empire). With glowing references from the Earl she went to the Royal Horticultural Society's Gardens at Wisley. That was where she met her future husband, Talbot. Then Cynthia secured a prestigious post at The Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew.

After over a year at Kew Gardens, Cynthia joined the WRNS (Women's Royal Naval Service) in 1946 where she became an Air Mechanic. Upon leaving the army, Cynthia left the WRNS on Marriage in December 1948.

After they had two children, Cynthia's husband accepted an overseas post, so they set sail to Hong Kong on 26 June 1953, the boat journey took them 1 month and 1 day.

Soon after they settled, Cynthia started to work for the Urban Services Department, and then was employed at Government House. This went on, and she served under three Governors of Hong Kong, Sir Alexander Grantham, Sir Robert Black and Sir David Trench. One of the many outstanding achievements was her being responsible for the Floral Decorations for the newly opened Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Kowloon.

With children growing up and going overseas for education, Cynthia again demonstrated her flair and ability. She became Interior Decorator of the 5 star Mandarin International Hotel in Hong Kong, then the Hyatt Hotel in Kowloon. On the way, she had passed two Certificates in Colloquial Cantonese 'The Lingua Franca' of Hong Kong and South China.

Cynthia then joined the vast conglomerate of the Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation. There, in no time she was promoted to Administrative Officer and put in charge of all the Housing. This was a tremendous undertaking and involved 'up keep' of accommodation, leasing, tenancies, and a myriad of human problems!

Cynthia's last task was also quite incredible and an illustration of the flair and general ability she had in abundance. This final 'task' undertaken with her usual skill and ability was during one of Hong Kong's most challenging episodes; being the deluge of Vietnamese Refugees into Hong Kong's territory from 1979 onwards. Cynthia kept a record of the Vietnamese onrush as it happened. She kept a complete 'dossier' (newspaper clippings, photographs, and all manner of information sheets) of events as the drama unfolded.

With her orderly mind and flair for research her efforts in this field has resulted in perhaps the most comprehensive record in existence. It included not only the Hong Kong experience, but that of Malaysia and neighbouring territories as well. Some of the newspaper reports were to say the least graphic, but they were all there in her carefully assembled albums of history. Having a great interest in Philately as mentioned this stood her in good stead resulting in an invaluable record of some of Hong Kong's most humanitarian events.

## About Talbot Bashall

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### Talbot Bashall I.S.O.

Talbot was born on in Ripley Surrey England on 19th July 1926. He is one of four children.

At the age of 17, straight out of high school, Talbot joined the Royal Air Force as a volunteer for air crew duty. A year later he was transferred to the Army as there was no more aircrew were needed. He went through officer training twice, at Mons Barracks at Aldershot and at Sandhurst.

In 1946, his first overseas posting was to Central Mediterranean Forces (CMF) Trieste, there the task of British Troops was to turn back hordes of Italians fleeing Marshal Tito's 'paradise', and seeking sanctuary in Trieste. For a 20-year-old British lieutenant, the task of stopping the trains heading into Italian territory and forcing the refugees back to Yugoslavia was not a pleasant one.

One of the most memorable will be the period when Talbot was guard officer in charge of Field Marshall Albert Kesselring, Commander in Chief of the German Armies on the Western Front at the end of World War II.

After service in Italy Talbot's battalion, part of First Armoured Division, 61st Lorried Infantry Brigade, was sent to Palestine (before the creation of the Jewish state of Israel). The prime duty of the British Forces was keep the peace between the Jews and Arabs. At age 22 years Talbot left the army and decided that a job in Forestry would be healthy and 'out of doors'.

After four years, with a wife and two young children, Talbot needed more money than forestry could provide. He applied for a position in Hong Kong. He was accepted and began his training in Britain. Talbot then went through a course at the Imperial Prison Training School in Yorkshire, the university of prison techniques where prison administration, handling of prisoners and other specialise knowledge was taught. He passed and arrived in Hong Kong in 1953.

After four years at Stanley Prison, he took over the job of training prison staff, passing on them what he had learned in Britain and Hong Kong. Then for six years he ran the Cape Collinson Training Center.

When the Hawker Control force was disbanded in 1979, Talbot gave a gigantic sigh of relief. "It was like the end of a sentence of 10 years' penal servitude" he says.

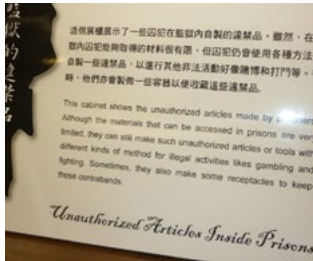
At 52, he was too young to retire. It was April 1979, Talbot was taken to an office in Victoria Barracks, shown around and appointed Controller, Refugee Control Centre. And then came the great exodus across the South China Sea as the Vietnamese forced hundreds of thousands of Chinese out to sea.

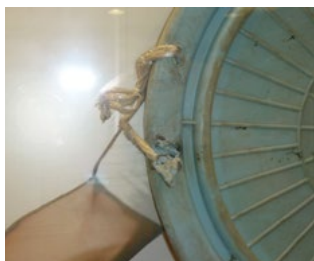
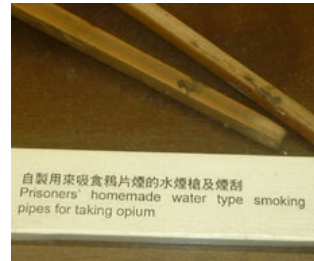
"It was challenging and demanding job – but a deeply satisfying one... I started off with refugees and now I am finishing my career with them," say thoughtfully.

In countries around the world there are thousands Vietnamese refugees who have never heard the name Talbot Bashall. But they all owe their unknown benefactor a debt of gratitude for the part played in helping to steer them on course for a new life.



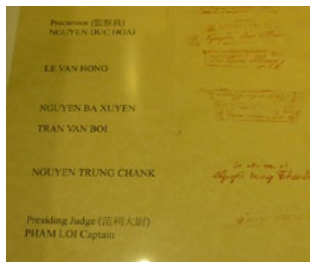
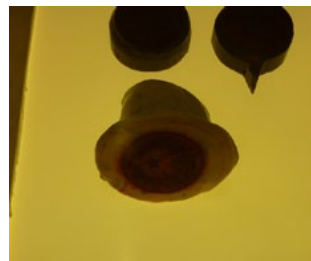
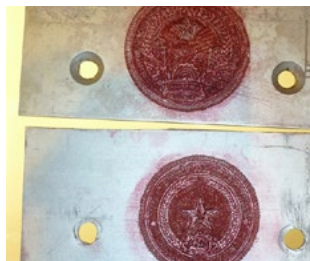
# Unauthorized items made by refugees













## Videos

A collection of videos about the Vietnamese boat people.

不漏洞拉



"Starting today, a new policy for Vietnamese Boat People (VBP) was adopted in Hong Kong. From now on, VBP who attempt to enter Hong Kong as economic refugees will be considered as illegal immigrants. As illegal immigrants, they will not have any possibility of resettlement in a third country; they will be detained pending repatriation to Vietnam."

Rioting



UNHCR: Hong Kong & Thailand



UNHCR: Vietnamese people going home

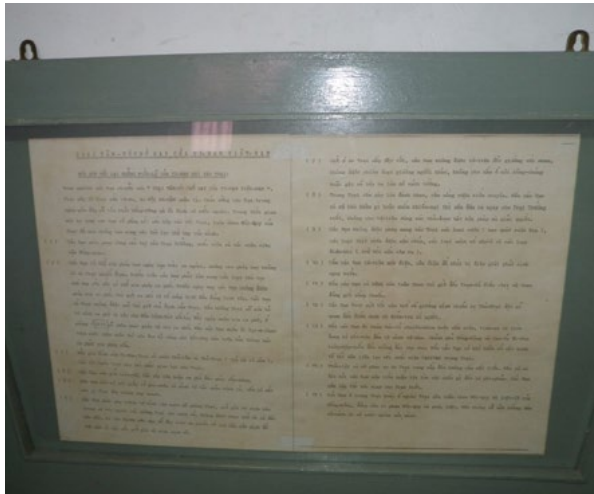


UNHCR: Camp at Lantau Island



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**The Love Poem**

I write this love poem  
To send to you -  
Live waves ripping out,  
Soaking an old shore,  
Waves whispering  
Night after night  
Without sleep,  
Pursuing through ages to come,  
Singing a love song  
I send this love poem  
From far away  
When our homeland  
Was dark and hidden,  
Light still flared up in my heart,  
Longing,  
Some day  
To sing a love song again,  
Then  
Fades and drops,  
Waves seek the shore,  
Break and flow back,  
Leave yellow sand gleaming  
Revealed like jewels  
In a crown of foam  
How many want to write  
How many want to speak  
When the crest of the water rushes on

A love poem  
Can not express these thoughts  
When storm waves from afar  
Crash onto the shore  
Another land!  
Many generations  
Through ages to come  
Will celebrate the good times of our lives  
The "I in love"  
The folk song "Quan họ"  
Rice fields, egret wings  
Sugarcane and bamboo  
Let me hear again the cicada's voice  
Let me see again  
The old school roof  
I am here now  
The edge of road -  
The shadow of their branches  
I wait in the autumn over Lam Hai  
Braving cool on your shoulders,  
I send this love poem  
From detention -  
Rain falls in floods  
Over the land of Hong Kong

Author: Le Mayth  
Translated by Nguyen Pham Mau  
Chinese translation by Cheng Liang  
Kuan

**Lives in Detention Centre**

Through, awkwardly, I choose the words to write  
And know my rhymes are poor  
I must express my pain - who cares  
Can any share? Right here, beneath this sky.

I did not choose to come too late -  
But now, resentful thousands, "VBP,"  
Day after day - Sad blowing winds and clouds  
Month after month - the sound of our lives

Iron roofs cover smiling lips  
Cramped fences keep in so many dreams  
Out lives are bets  
For greedy selfish men

A beautiful life - the girl of 20 dreams  
A lonely night - hidden tears on the pillow  
Your wish - a small comb - a bra to fit  
Sounds like an accusation

A child's startled cry for mother at night  
Reaching out... to cling... to nothingness  
The huge earth has no space for you  
Humanity gives you a small wooden board and a prison number

A child's startled cry for mother at night  
Reaching out... to cling... to nothingness  
The huge earth has no space for you  
Humanity gives you a small wooden board and a prison number

A young woman with sad and fading lips  
Lulling her child, she sings the world into sadness  
The sad tears fall from her eyes  
To freeze the future of her child - in the strange cold land

A young boy sits cross - legged at the corner of the bunk  
He witnesses the passing afternoon, wasted springs  
Barbed wire! How close and yet so far  
From hell to dream-land

We fled brutality by sailing far -  
Hoping on land to find humanity and love  
Detention life - too much injustice here  
We cry out to the heart of the world

Help us - don't force us back  
Or leave us here to rot

Author: Nguyen Thuy Quyen  
Translated by Nguyen Dinh Dung  
Chinese translation by Lau Chi Chung

**To Be a Refugee Woman**

To be a refugee woman  
is to face the ethics of politics and persecution over which you have no control,  
to struggle over the decisions to face the best of your fate, the ever-changing area  
of the so-called "family".  
It is to fight to secure the security that your young daughter might be better wrong  
than at all.  
It is to pray that you will not join the over 100,000 boat people who have died  
at sea.

To be a refugee woman  
is to see the unbroken record of violence of war zones and to know the  
vulnerability of life in refugee camps.  
It is to fight to secure the security that your young daughter might be better wrong  
than at all.

To be a refugee woman  
is to watch the construction of your husband before power over which he has  
no control.  
It is to watch your partner in life slowly wearing down in the stomach,  
ditching resentment which is a way of life.  
It is to struggle to maintain human dignity and fight dependency on his  
confidence as he works more hours and needs to be seen and to talk  
without a reason to support a deity and to secure their future.

To be a refugee woman  
is to gaze upon the severed heads of the young and to know the mines have not  
stopped down.  
It is to look into vacant eyes and know the violence has wrecked her obvious  
wealth in shattered hearts and minds.

To be a refugee woman  
is to watch your children growing up in an environment as unlike the dreams you  
held for them.  
It is to leave the abundance of the language and culture of the home country if that  
you ever had.

To be a refugee woman  
is to sit on ships by day and to live each day as a corner -  
And to give the earth with living prayer for a better future  
embodied by the fruit of your wish

Suey Chawford

# Oral History

## Interviewees

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## Alan Yee

Interviewee: Alan Yee (AY)  
 Bonnie Wong: (BW)  
 Interviewer: (I)  
 8:20AM, Saturday 14 September 2013, Novotel Hotel in Hong Kong

**I: Could you please state your full name, your date of birth and where you were born?**

AY: My full name is Yee Shen-Eng Yee Leng Chau. I was born and bred in Hong Kong. I was born on January 12th, 1957. I was born in the countryside of Hong Kong. My father came from China, and my mother was from Penang in Malaysia. But actually they are Chinese, from Mainland China. After the World War, when the new Chinese Government took over, both of them came to Hong Kong. I have five members in my family and I am in the middle. I have an elder brother, and elder sister, myself, a younger sister and the youngest is my brother.

**I: How does it feel like to be in the middle [of your family]? Do they always pick on you?**

AY: It felt good. My elder brother always looked after me. He paid the bills when I was in secondary school and offered me food as well.

**I: I [would like] to hear as much as I can about your experience with the boat people and how you came to know about the Vietnamese boat people situation in Hong Kong. Also, was there anything significant you remember and what did this whole experience in Hong Kong meant to you?**

AY: I first [came to know] about the boat people when I was younger, as I always listened to the radio because of the war in Vietnam. That is how I knew about the Vietnamese boat people for the first time. And then in the late '70s, I saw on TV a lot of boat people from Vietnam were coming to Hong Kong. By that time, I didn't have much feeling about this. Because we didn't have any experience [with the Vietnamese boat people] up to that point, [I] just thought it was the news. But eventually, the boat people kept on coming into Hong Kong. For example, we needed to find some place to provide them with food and shelter. I think it became a problem [for Hong Kong]. I feel very surprised, because boat people [travelled] in a very small boat from Vietnam. It was a long way to come to Hong Kong. I don't know the exact distance [from Vietnam to Hong Kong], but in a small boat [like the ones used by the Vietnamese refugees] it would take about half a month; something like that.

**I: At least half a month.**

AY: Yes, it scared me in Hong Kong. By that time, I wondered what we could do in Hong Kong [for the Vietnamese boat people] and whether there was something we could do.

**I: Did you continue to follow the news and get updated with the situation?**

AY: Yes. For a long time, I would keep [up to date] with the news every day on TV and announcements on the Vietnamese boat people. Everyone who watched TV was concerned with the number of [Vietnamese] boat people coming to Hong Kong, and when it would stop [as well as] when improvements [to the numbers of arrivals] would happen. I am not speaking on behalf of all the Hong Kong people, but just as an ordinary man like [myself]. We didn't think [it would] have an effect on our life, because we lived in a [comfortable] place. But we all wondered how they would survive in a small place [like Hong Kong]; that [was] my concern. I think the Hong Kong Government did a very good job [in the given situation].



**I: Yes they did, especially with such a high number of the Vietnamese boat people coming to their shores. Did you feel like [the situation] was affecting the economy and financially affecting the way of life of the Hong Kong people because of [the cost] of handling the Vietnamese people?**

AY: I don't have the figures, officially, [of money spent by the Hong Kong] Government. But I don't think it was a [great] problem. [This was] because in Hong Kong, by that time, the economy was booming. I don't think it caused a big problem [to the Hong Kong people]. [One concern of the Hong Kong people might be] the security problem. [For example] if some boat people came out and [committed any] crime, what would the Hong Kong Government do? Besides that, I don't think it affected the economy.

**I: What did you think when you hear about the riots and fighting and conflicts amongst the Vietnamese people with the Government [with the refugees subsequently] burning down the camp?**

AY: Because it was [occurring] in the camp, at that time it didn't affect the ordinary life of the Hong Kong citizen. I don't think it was a big problem. We didn't see any crimes committed by the boat people at that time if they came out. Maybe [they happened], I don't know. Actually we didn't have much of a problem with them.

**I: Because they are remote and located far away from society?**

AY: Yes. But I know from Tian Tuen Mun, some boat people could work during the day time [which was improving the situation]. By that time, I think the Hong Kong Government had spoken [a lot] about the boat people situation with the United Nations. By that time, it didn't cause much of a problem. Maybe [this was because] the security [department of Hong Kong] had done a lot of things to protect the Hong Kong citizen.

I: [Speaks to Bonnie] It was a very challenging job to make sure that everybody was safe and to protect the Hong Kong people as well. You're looking at one time, nearly 70,000 Vietnamese boat people in various camps. It was a very challenging job [to manage them all].

BW: It is not easy, in particular when at times we don't understand why they were so disgruntled and why they should put up such resistance [towards us]. Some of the reasons they gave were beyond my imagination. For example, even they all wanted to go to [America] and if they were screened-in by European countries, they didn't want to go to Europe at all; [and they were not interested in Europe. They would protest because they were screened into European countries.]

And if we had to put up with disturbances like that, it was quite a puzzling situation. Why should they be so disgruntled? They all wanted to go to [America]. If they were going to France, Britain, Germany [or] Sweden they would get very resistant. And they wouldn't want to board the flight. And we would have to sort out these differences and that is where our work [would become] rather frustrating. Because we didn't think that we should be handling such issues. We could understand if they were protesting about being confined or if the food wasn't good, or things like that, relating to their daily life or their daily treatment [in the camps]. We could understand those [situations] better. But if they were [creating] disturbance for such reasons [like being sent to Europe], it was very puzzling.

**I: Did it happen quite often?**

BW: Initially, [it happened] in the early [times] when there were more interested countries in Europe to accept them. Of course towards the end of the period, there was hardly anyone screened in and there was very little hope [for the refugees], basically. But initially, when they were being screened in by European countries and there was more interest and more help coming in from [the] international [community] that was where we found difficulties. I am still puzzled as to why we should be doing something like this. To a certain extent I can understand – for example, the refugees wouldn't know [much about] Sweden, the language etc. – and it would be a totally new life for themselves and their descendants. But, I still find it a little bit difficult to understand that [as a refugee] in finding refuge in a safer place, [Sweden or another European country] would still be better than being in a camp I would think. These were our thoughts and feelings at that time [when] we had to do a job like this. I couldn't understand [the refugees' response] and [my] couldn't understand [the refugees' response] and my frustration arose at that type of thing.

**I: What were some of the [refugees'] form of resistance?**

BW: They wouldn't move, they wouldn't come out and they wouldn't [leave the camps].

**I: When is the time for them to leave [the camps]?**

BW: If they were screened-in, they would be [allowed] to go out into an open camp to await flights. But they wouldn't want to leave. And then we had to struggle and persuade them to get them out [of the camps].

**I: That's why it is so important to speak with people like you and Alan because each of you has a different experience of the Vietnamese boat people 'saga' at different periods of time. And this is the kind of [information] that would not come out in the news or any public records that I can see.**

**I [addresses Alan]: Did you and your family discuss the Vietnamese boat people situation at home?**

AY: Not much. Actually, because it didn't affect us a lot, because my wife is not ... [interrupted]. Because, my. My thinking is that the boat people would eventually not stay in Hong Kong because Hong Kong is too small. So eventually we went to a European or foreign country so that we could stay for a short time. I didn't discuss much [about the Vietnamese boat people] with my family. My wife didn't understand. But for men like me, we watched TV every day to see what the movement [in the situation] is, what was happening and what was discussed on the news. We were concerned. But not every family in Hong Kong would have talked about this. But Hong Kong people were very concerned about the boat people, because of issues like safety, their future and what they [the refugees] would do in the future. I think many of the Hong Kong people would think like that.

**I: Did you realise [imagine] this in the situation would last 25 years when [the influx] first started? I didn't believe it either?**

AY: You would only see the boats, the very small boats. The first time only a few boats came to Hong Kong. But suddenly, more and more boats were coming, and it raised our attention to watch what would happen in the future.

BW: I was appalled when I saw the conditions of the small boats; I felt so sorry for [them] for the babies. When you come to managing them, I would get quite discouraged. When they first got hot food, they wouldn't even wait [in line]. [It was quite a scene to see them] all rushing up to snatch food. And then we would have worries about the women and children who didn't have the strength to come forward to [snatch]get the food. And I would feel sorry [for them] because they would come in such conditions and wouldn't even care for their own people. And then we would have to make sure that the women and children – especially the unaccompanied ones – would get their food. We also had problems with protecting young women and children; what we would call unaccompanied minors. We were quite worried about [them].

AY: The Hong Kong people were very sad about that. They wanted to give a hand to the boat people, but what could they do? Of course they tried to do something for the boat people. In our hearts, we felt that if we could do something [we would]. Madam Bonnie said that they were worried about the safety of the young women in the camps.

**I: The Hong Kong people and the Government were very generous to the Vietnamese boat people, especially in the way that no boats were pushed back [into the ocean] or turned away. Because when that happened, we would have lost more lives [like what happened] in Malaysia and Thailand.**

AY: How could you survive on board the boat? Did you have fresh water and food?

**I: When we started, we had some very light porridge – just rice congee with salt. And then eventually it all ran out, and people started to die. So if we didn't come to Indonesia soon, we would have lost more people because we had run out of food and water.**

BW: We [heard] the news about the Malaysians and Indonesians towing the boats out into the ocean. I think in

general, people in Hong Kong do not accept that [kind of behaviour]. I think that the impression I get is that [the Hong Kong people] are not happy with so many [refugees] coming [into Hong Kong]. But I don't think many would support the policy of towing the boats out into the ocean. I think at one stage, they may say words like 'we should tow [the boats] back out into the ocean'. But I don't think they really mean [what they say] and that it would be accepted by the Hong Kong people in general. And another thing is, although a large amount of money was spent on the [refugees] by the Hong Kong Government, theoretically the United Nations (UN) would pay [the Hong Kong Government] back. Besides, in those days, there was very little – what was called – 'social security'; or money being distributed by the Government to the people. The taxes were generally used to put up public utilities. So [in terms of] the immediate and instant effect on the people [of Hong Kong]... normal Government subsidies on the people weren't reduced. The normal lives [of the Hong Kong people] were not affected. But they somehow sensed that if they continued in this way, then there would be an effect on the people of Hong Kong [in terms of] housing, finding them work, school etc. They realised that if they were all stuck here, there would be a problem. But as Alan says, it didn't affect the daily life [of the Hong Kong people].

**I: It is very intriguing for me that you are very supportive of this oral history project. I was wondering why you wanted to get involved in this [project] and what it means to you.**

AY: I think human beings have to 'offer their hands' if [they are able to help]. For me, I come from a family where I worked hard. When I was young, I lived in the countryside. By that time (in the early 60's), so many illegal immigrants from China came to cross the border from the hills, down to our village. And my father gave them food and offered to let them stay for a few days at our home. So I think this was the education given to me by my parents. And when somebody died, my father carried the dead body to the hills. This is how I learned at that time to help people [when I was able to]. I like to [be able to 'give back' when I can].

**I: Do you think it is important to be able to recall this history of Hong Kong for future generations, [for them] to understand what happened in the past?**

AY: Sure! We need history and to be able to talk to the second and third generations as to how Hong Kong has changed. [For example] what happened in Hong Kong's history; this is very important. I'm fully supportive of this project when Madam Bonnie spoke to me [about it] and I asked what I could do [to help]. At the time I was thinking I could print a book [for you] because I'm a printer, I thought this would be fine. But this has changed, and this is fine, no problem. I would like to support [this project].

**I: I was curious because most of us who are involved in this project have previously worked with the boat people or are boat people themselves, or have some direct experience or contact with them. It's nice to know that other people who are not directly involved [with the Vietnamese boat people] have some interest.**

AY: I'm glad to be able to do something in this project.

I'm sure that [many of those] in the Hong Kong Government such as Madam Bonnie worked more [closely with the Vietnamese refugees] than I did. I have to salute [their efforts]. I can see there is a lot of history there. A lot of friends would talk to me about what they faced in the camps, and we are in a 'different world' in Hong Kong. At that time, we didn't know what was happening [in the camps]. I'm glad to sit here and speak with you [in order] to learn more [about the issue of the Vietnamese boat people]. This morning I read your book and saw one million boat people are spread out all over the world. I think a few million [many] have died...

**I: We lost at least 200,000 at sea. An estimated one out of three [Vietnamese boat people] died. So for every 2 people who survived, one died at sea.**

**I: Bonnie, when I come to know more about your operations here, I continue to be amazed at how everyone in the [Hong Kong] Government continued to poolpull their resources together and handled the situation for such a long time, in such a complicated fashion.**

BW: Firstly, it is an international issue. And secondly, people in general do not trust the disciplinary services. If there are any disturbances, conflict, rioting or forced use, it is bound to be [perceived as] us 'beating up' people. And there would be a lot of media reporting on brutal beatings etc. And so we had to be very careful about these things. No



one, including the general public of Hong Kong, would accept the brutal treatment of anybody. So the Government had to be very careful, as the [Vietnamese refugees] were under Government care. And the Government couldn't stand the blame from international and local communities. First of all, Human Rights issues had to be safeguarded and have to be seen [as being carried out correctly]. During these operations, we had to get monitors in, including a Justice of Peace to monitor the situation. And that, of course, was not received very well or welcomed by people in the field. It [demonstrated] a simple lack of trust of our work, right? But it is something we had to accept, because the Government in general, couldn't accept a criticism of brutal treatment. And we also couldn't afford any failures in repatriations.

We couldn't just say, 'we cannot [board] these people onto flights' for example. Basically, there is no alternative for us [in terms of making mistakes]. We tried a lot of things to limit criticism [against the Government]. We recruited people directly from the community into the camp, without any formal training. This was to avoid people saying we were treating [the Vietnamese refugees] like prisoners. And I said that I wished they were treated like prisoners. [This was because] in the treatment of prisoners, you know that they should have [access to] a bed, recreational areas and every right to these things, including work and exercise areas etc. However, all the things that we would consider 'necessities' in the treatment of people [prisoners] were not available [to the refugees] in the camps. But [treating the Vietnamese refugees] as life prisoners is very humiliating indeed, so in order to avoid this, we needed to recruit people directly – fresh from society – and then put them in the camps. So if they were never trained and had worked in a prison, how could you say that the Vietnamese refugees were treated like prisoners? They were temporary staff, known as 'VM' staff – not even regular, [permanent] staff. So we tried every effort to beat scepticism from the community, so as to not be seen as mistreating [the Vietnamese refugees].

**I: I did see some articles about the Vietnamese boat people being mistreated by some of the [camp] officials. The number of incidents was very small, but was this in the initial stages [of the Vietnamese boat people situation]?**

BW: No. Even in the initial stages, when there is a large movement in the camps and when resistance came, there would be some conflict. For example, where people would be forced onto the lorries and so on. And this would lead to allegations of assault and [the incident would be] reported as if we had assaulted them brutally. Basically, I think this is the criticism and stress that the staff faced. The staff just didn't know what to do; whether they should [enforce] law and order or just let [the Vietnamese refugees] do whatever they liked. And the staff had a job to do, but they would be very apprehensive and they knew they were facing criticism [from the public and international community]. But I think that it is inevitable. Everywhere in the world, people cannot accept disciplinary force being applied. And there will [inevitably] be accusations of unnecessary [force being applied]. It's very difficult. It's also very disputable what is necessary and what is 'too much' [force being applied]. I don't think anybody can judge, except the officer on duty [whether the force being applied is too much]. Of course, some [officers] would go too far and make sure the [refugees] were subdued. Others would be more lenient, but that is just a fact of life.

**I: Was there any particular story or incident throughout the history of the Vietnamese boat people in Hong Kong that comes to mind?**

AY: You are the first of the boat people I know – I don't know many. Everything [I heard] came from the news, from TV. I do think that in a country like Vietnam, a rice-planting country, when it suddenly becomes a very tough country, I feel uncomfortable. Because we think Vietnam is a very nice, Asian country with a lot of food and rice. Thailand and Vietnam have grown a lot of wealth. There is some reason it is like this. For me, the boat people can have a better life [here in Hong Kong]. I do hope for this. If you ask me what has affected me or made me think about the boat people, it is because I grew up with boat people in Hong Kong. Because every day [I saw them on] the news and they became a part of my life. Of course, another part of my life is the handover of Hong Kong [to China]. So these two things are [big incidents] that are always on my mind.

BW: I think for the majority of people in Hong Kong, remembering the Vietnamese people would be [associated] with the riots. [This is] because for each repatriation, we had to initiate what we call, an 'exercise'. [The] police and everybody else would be involved because we had to get them [the Vietnamese refugees] out. It was reported in the news, so [those are the incidents that are most likely to be reported]. Because of the concern of [the Hong Kong Officers] using undue force and how the refugees were being mistreated when they were being repatriated was widely reported in the news and media. So I think people will remember about the riots. Even [Alan] was telling me yesterday that he remembered how I went on TV to explain how things were [at the time], such as how many grenades were thrown and that type of thing.

BW: [In terms of] the daily arrivals, yes, they were reported daily. Today there might be 900, tomorrow there might be

300. It was just a routine [procedure]. I don't think the number [of arrivals] made a large impact on the general public. But it made an impact on us [in terms of] accommodation and where we were going to house [the refugees]. But for the general public, another couple of hundred arriving [wouldn't make a huge difference to the general populace of Hong Kong].

AY: Yes, I can see it in my mind. How Madam Bonnie was speaking to the media... but it all happened in the camp.

**I: When you said grenades were thrown, what did you mean?**

BW: It was tear gas [grenades].

**I remember [reading about] one incident where something like 300 rounds of tear gas were discharged.**

BW: That was in Whitehead [detention centre]. Whitehead had over 10,000 people. We, as camp operators do not like such large camps. We like small camps, where the staff can get to know the Vietnamese people being detained. And the people being detained would have the chance to get to know the staff as well. We place emphasis on this 'human relationship', as some sort of mutual understanding or mutual respect. Personally I am against having large crowds [of people] together [in the detention camps]. If any [incident] happened, it ignited emotions instantly. And then, instead of having to deal with a few hundred, you have 10,000 [refugees] to deal with. It is a completely different scale of handling things. But of course, at that time there was no alternative – you couldn't find so many small camps. It was lucky that the Government could put up a place called High Island, and Whitehead would be able to house them [all the small camps] together. Of course putting up small camps would mean more demand on human resources.

AY: One thing I can say is that the Northern Vietnamese are different from the Southern Vietnamese people. The only concern for me at that time was that a lot of people would [give] a lot of trouble to the Southerners [those from the South of Vietnam]. The 'Northerners' are very strong and tough, the Southerners [aren't]. Northern Vietnam attacked the South... these are my concerns.

BW: There are different values [between the North and South of Vietnam]. It is very important, when managing a group of – what we call – 'foreign' people. The problem is when they have different values. Our standard would be for some closed countries under tyrant rule – for example, treatment [of refugees] like this would be unacceptable to countries like Sweden where their Human Rights [standards] are very high. There are different expectations and values that caused a lot of problems to [the camp] management. [This is] because this is the standard that we accept and [the general public] know that we accept these basic standards. People in Hong Kong know what the living environment and sanitary conditions would be like [under] the minimum standards. If they fall well below the minimum accepted standards, [the general public of Hong Kong] wouldn't accept [this treatment of the Vietnamese refugees]. So from each country, the so-called minimum standard differs. One standard may be already very good, but the other may be very appalling and unacceptable. That is basically the problem with managing people from different countries. It is like that all over the world.

**I: What were some of the major differences that had you noticed between the Northern Vietnamese and the Southern Vietnamese?**

BW: The Northern Vietnamese were more violent. They were less likely to reason and they 'demanded' things, [for example] stating that America would be the place they wanted to go to [for resettlement]. And they would consider that to be their 'right'; to be non-negotiable. Whereas others from a more liberal society [the Southerners] would be more open to negotiation and willing to listen to what [the camp management] had to say. They would take a more 'civilised' approach.

AY: We only know that the Northern part [of Vietnam] is more ... communist.

BW: They are communist. [The refugees] tried to differentiate themselves from those in Hong Kong and China. Basically, they [the Northern Vietnamese] tried to demand [their rights] and thought that whatever they wanted was their right [to have] and they could do whatever they liked; that it was their 'right'. But we knew that it wasn't their 'right'; we would negotiate with them and try to convince others [through persuasion and negotiation]. It would make things very difficult for us and very frustrating, making the [refugees] very difficult to manage, because their values were very different [to ours].

AY: Were you able to distinguish [from their facial features] the differences between the Northern and Southern Vietnamese?

BW: Thirty years ago, you could easily distinguish between a 'Hong Kong Chinese' and 'Chinese-Chinese' person [someone originally from China]; [looking at] how they dress and how they behave. Especially in the early '70s, you could quite easily tell [which was which]; they behaved differently. Like with the Hai Phong people, if you asked them to manage and organise their own community they would do it quite well. But with the boat people who arrived later, it was a waste of time, if you know what I mean.

**I: What do you think makes [the Northern Vietnamese] think that they have the 'right' to demand things?**

BW: That is how they behave! I don't know why they think that they have this right... anything less than that is not acceptable [to them]. That, I think, is the common trait of people [from Northern Vietnam]. They are deprived of freedom for so long and then they don't understand what freedom is. Then they come to think that freedom means, 'I can do whatever I like', without respecting the freedom of others. I think this is the problem for most closed countries. To suddenly come to a free community where they can say what they like and do what they like, they have [discovered] that this is 'freedom' – to be able to do and say whatever I like [and] that others will have to 'give' me what I want. This is my own observation; that they don't understand [the concept of] 'freedom'.

**I: That is a very interesting observation. It is probably the best explanation [of their behaviour] as well.**

AY: But how can they do that, because if they move to some other country – not their hometown – [how will the other people in the country respond]?

BW: Because you have been in a free community, you will know the rules and respect the rights of others. But if you have been controlled all the time and you hear the word 'freedom' – freedom is just a concept to you. It's not something you have [experienced] or enjoyed [yourself]. It's just a word – 'free'. So if you are free, then you have to test the extent of what your freedom allows you to do. This is like children, understanding freedom – you have to understand what that freedom allows you to do. So once you are no longer a child [and have grown up], that is how you can understand freedom. To them, freedom could be just a word. To people who are not free, they are not allowed to leave the country, or even their own community / district. They are there and they cannot even travel to another province. They are being restricted in their movements.

So to them, [they have no] freedom of religion; they are so restricted that they can't even go to church. So 'freedom' is just a word to them. But when [their freedom] becomes something real to them, they [don't know] how to use it. It's like a two-year old when you give them some money. I remember my nephew, when I gave him some money to buy certain things. He gave all the money [away] and came back, [forgetting about the change]. He didn't care about the change. [This is] because he has no concept of money [at his age]. All he knew was that the money could be exchanged for a drink. He doesn't understand the value of money. What does he care if it costs \$100 for a drink?

AY: I wonder, because the Vietnamese were previously ruled by the French, they should have educated the Vietnamese in a European-style?

**I: A large part of the [Vietnamese] population was quite educated, affluent and had the influence of Western society. But that was a different generation. A lot of people from the North hadn't had contact with the foreigners since 1954 when the country [was] divided.**

BW: The fall of Saigon occurred about twenty years after Northern Vietnam was established. So theoretically speaking, Northern Vietnam was established under communist rule for twenty years – it was for almost a generation, where the old values were dying. The new values were coming in for the younger people.

**I: So in the early days, around 1975-'76, especially for those who came from the South, you could see the difference in values, intellectual-level and level of understanding. But later, because they had been isolated from the outside world, they had not been given a lot of information and their life had become very restricted.**

BW: They had information, but they didn't know what that was. They didn't know how to exercise it.

BW: It was just like the Cultural Revolution in China. You were brought up learning nothing about the outside world. But the problem is, in learning nothing about the outside world, you won't know [anything] about it! That is one thing... the Americans are very powerful. Every country behind the Iron Curtain knows about Coca Cola [laughs]. They all admire Coca Cola. They do not have Coca Cola, but they all know about it. So what do they do when they see [a Coca Cola bottle]? They want to drink it, because Coca Cola is the 'thing' to drink.

AY: So they learn this in school, through their education?

BW: You are told [in school] that this is no good. But on the other hand, you get other information about how great Coca Cola is. So everybody knows about Coca Cola; this is the change in China.

AY: It's a big change. I'm wondering, in twenty years this generation has changed so quickly and they don't have any history at all.

[Discusses Vietnamese propaganda on radio with Carina and Bonnie]

AY: Spoke in Vietnamese, 'bat dau tu hom nay'. Those are the only words I know in Vietnamese and they impacted me a lot.

**I: 'Bat dau tu hom nay' means 'starting from today'. I remember there was an announcement in the media saying, 'if you arrive in Hong Kong starting from today by boat, you will no longer be considered a refugee but you will be returned to Vietnam'.**

BW: That was the height of the exodus / influx. We were so tired of the influx of refugees, and they were all coming in and expected to be treated as refugees. So we warned [the Vietnamese] that if they came [into Hong Kong], they would be locked up and screened and that sort of thing.

BW: Even nowadays when they are referring to the Vietnamese on the radio and comics etc., they will say 'bat dau tu hom nay'.

**I: I'm glad you brought it up, because it did come up in some of the literature [in my research]. But I never heard from someone who actually remembered the term.**

BW: If you were there in Hong Kong during those days, all [the Hong Kong people] remember this term. And they all understand [what it means].

**I: Well thank you for taking the time out from your busy day to meet me.**



## Alistair Asprey



11:20am Sat 5th January 2013 Business Centre/The T Hotel

**Interviewer (I):** Can you state your full name?

**Alistair Asprey (AA):** My name is Alistair Peacan Asprey

**I:** When and where were you born?

**AA:** I was born in Scotland in June 1944

**I:** Can you please tell me when and how you got involved with the Vietnamese boat people in Hong Kong?

**AA:** Yes, I was not really involved at all in the initial influx of Vietnamese boat people into HK in the 1970's with the fall of Saigon. I didn't become involved until the late 1980's till the beginning of 1989 in fact when I joined the security branch first at deputy and then later in 1990-95 when I was secretary for security. So it was really for those 6 years

that I was involved with the Vietnamese boat people.

**I: How was it like at first?**

AA: Well when I first became involved it was still what you would call a crisis because the number of boat people have flowed in over the years into HK. In some years and months there was a very big influx and then it died down and many of the original people got resettled and then you would get a renewed influx. At the time I first became involved there was a very large influx into HK. We were getting several hundred a day arriving. On one day we had more than 1000 arrive which was the largest no. I remember on one day. At the same time it was a turning point. The HK government had just taken the decision that we were not to give refugee status to all new arrivals. We would have a screening system to screen all new refugees for resettlement and for the others who we felt eventually the only option would be to would be able to be repatriated back to Vietnam when it was safe to return back to Vietnam.

**I: What were some difficulties that you experienced in that time?**

AA: In many ways the day to day difficulties were very, very great. To actually find a place to accommodate the new arrivals to find new camps or to build new camps to cater for the people arriving was a great logistic exercise. Then we had quite a political problem as well. The international community had lost interest in Vietnamese boat people by that time. We had great difficulty in resettling the remaining refugees in HK at that time. Must have been still 20,000 living at HK at that stage and certainly the international review were not ready to accept a continuing commitment to resettle all the Vietnamese boat people that arrived in the countries first asylum. That was why the HK government decided we couldn't record refugee status automatically to all new arrivals and that we required a screening process. The HK government had to take the initiative on this and it was only after this that the international community decided to adopt the same policy. Shortly after I became involved 6 months later ( The middle of 1989) another conference was convened in Geneva of all the countries involved with the Vietnamese refugees and at that conference they confirmed that the position we had taken in HK we couldn't have automatic refugee status for all arrivals and we would need a screening system.

**I: Based on the policy side how did the HK people react to the whole thing?**

AA: Well probably as you would expect,- not a very sympathetic. There was a feeling that they were using up a tremendous use of resources in HK. I think there was sympathy for genuine refugees but I think there was a feeling that most of these people arriving were not genuine refugees but people in search of a better life and I wouldn't say there was a feeling against the boat people, not hostile exactly, but not sympathetic.

**I: What were some of the most difficult things you had to deal with in your time with the boat people?**

AA: Probably the most difficult thing besides the logistics was to try to institute a program of repatriation for the non-refugees. We had a lot of starts and stops on that, but eventually we managed to persuade the UNRCHR that they should go along with us on a program of repatriation and that they would monitor them when they returned to Vietnam and make sure they were adequately taken care of. I think that was probably the most difficult part.

**I: What about the Vietnamese government side? How Cooperative were they with the repatriates? On a policy level?**

AA: They were fairly cooperating. I think the turning point and in a way the most memorable moment of this was when HK did the first repatriation exercise.

**I: When was that?**

AA: I think early 1990. It was the first repatriation which HK did on its own. Everybody else/ everybody in the world you could say were hostile to this. All the upper governments and the UNRHCR didn't want us to do it and were very hostile but we did do it. I can't remember how many there were but I was on the first flight and there were about 100.

**I: You were on that First flight?**



AA: Yes I was on that first flight to Vietnam and the Vietnamese received us well actually. We felt that they were trying to cooperate but there was a big outcry/ International outcry about it after but for that reason the Vietnamese government,- I'm only guessing here. What they were really looking for was they were trying to normalise their relations with the US and the rest of the world and get accepted and because of the outcry that there was about this. I think the Vietnamese government took fright of this and it took a long time before we could institute another repatriation.

**I: Why was there an outcry? Was it the way it was carried out? Or the fact that people were repatriated?**

AA: I think it was because.. well. Probably two things. The first it was not voluntary. It was mandatory. But we/ there was a group of people that had been screened out and we said well we are going to return these to Vietnam. We couldn't see any reason looking into their background why they shouldn't return to Vietnam [and that] they would be at risk there. I think also the/ in a way this was a ground-breaking action and I think that really in some ways the rest of the world was shocked that we could take this action on our own. Against the wishes of the International community. But in a way it despite the entire outcry it did serve its purpose. It showed the way that this would eventually be resolved and certainly later on the International community and the URHCR did come around to accepting this.

**I: At the time when it first started what would the number the people that were screened out estimate?**

AA: I would think that probably we screened out about 85% and somewhere between 10-12-15% would be screened in as genuine refugees. That's a very rough estimate and I wouldn't write it in as a definite account.

**I: From my research the total of refugees returning from HK were about 70,000 overall. So when you first started what was the first number that prompted this action?**

AA: I think probably we had about at that stage 50,000 Vietnamese refugees. It did go well above that figure. Somewhere at about 80,000. Of course a lot of people that had been to HK left as refugees and of course people being born and I think at one stage we estimated that in total about 250,000 Vietnamese boat people had passed through HK over a period of over 25 years perhaps.

**I: Could you describe to me the scene of the people on that first return trip?**

AA: Yes.. Well.. In fact when there were held in building sort of separate from all the other Vietnamese. We put them there because we were going to repatriate them and they knew that and the press knew that. There were a lot of press gathered outside at about 5 am. So there were a lot of crying and shouting when they were put onto the buses. .. But in fact.. once they got to the airport and onto plane everyone was really quite calm. The flight went really smoothly indeed. Everyone was really calm and there was no real problems at all on the flight or even getting off the other end.

**I: How were they received? The whole crew received by the government in Vietnam?**

AA: Yes, I think they were, they seemed to be taken care of. There was transport waiting for them when we arrived in Hanoi.

**I: Were they put in camps?**

AA: I think they were put in a transient camp but not for very long. I think for a few days to a week until they returned to where they had come from because they hadn't all come from Hanoi. Some were in outlying areas.

**I: Did you have to have a lot of police or the government people to accompany the returnees on that trip?**

AA: Yes there were a lot of police on board the aircraft. We probably over did it because we were not sure. We needed to make sure there would be no trouble or we could cope with the trouble. As I said Friday was very calm there was nothing significant happened.



**I: Did it take the government in HK a long time to work this out with the Vietnamese government?**

AA: Yes, quite some time. Probably took.. Well the first flight must have been about a year after the screening of new arrivals. SO it took a long time to work out a system with the Vietnamese government.

**I: Did it ever occur to you what would happen if the Vietnamese government refused to take them back? And you had to screen out what would you do with them?**

AA: Well.. Yes, it was obviously the big worry that we wouldn't be able to. I think that we really saw that as the likely long term result. Certainly by this stage early 1990's one could see that Vietnam was changing. Establish normal relationships with the US and other countries. So we always felt that in the end Vietnam would take accept responsibility for its own nationals and take them all back.

**I: I should have reframed my question. This is all new to me. When you decided to have the screening process that was to see if they met the criteria and at that stage did you already have the thought of returning them as well or you just go along and come up with the action?**

AA: Well.. I think when the screening process was introduced. Certainly at that stage we had not agreed any arrangements with the Vietnamese for their return. We went ahead with this on the basis that we would be able to make some arrangements for their return with the Vietnamese government. I think at that stage they had taken a few back but people that had gone back voluntarily. I think there was always some/not many but even some of the refugees that said "We'll go back to Vietnam".

**I: Were those people who volunteered at first would they return on their own expenses or were they assisted by the HK government?**

AA: I don't know if it was we or the UNRHCR that assisted them but they were given assistance. Yes.

**I: But it wasn't like an organised airplane like that later took place that cost you about 1.5million each trip is that right?**

AA: I'm not sure now... But it was expensive. Well I was saying the result of the first mandatory repatriation exercise really was that we... The Vietnamese government decided that they were not sure about this. So it was some time after this that we had a program of voluntary repatriation. We had a lot of flights of people that did volunteer to go back and eventually we were able to reinstitute compulsory repatriation.

**I: Within that year that you waited for the second return trip were there more Vietnamese people come over?**

AA: Yes a lot. A lot.

**I: Would any of it have to do with the fact that the outcry from the International?**

AA: I don't think it was that. I think in the middle of 89. Sometime in July. There was the conference held on the Vietnamese boat people by the UNRHCR which all the countries involved participated. That seemed to act as a deadline. We got a huge influx in the months prior to that and then after that the no's dropped away quite dramatically. So it seemed that these International conferences were some kind of magnet. There was nothing quite significant about them but it seemed that the word that travelled through Vietnam was to get out before then and after that the no's dropped quite dramatically.

**I: So looking back what were some of you feelings about this whole situation?**

AA: I think that my main feeling is that ...I'm very grateful that HK acted very honourably and compassionately to the Vietnamese. We didn't turn them away we accepted them, we fed them, we housed them, we tried to make arrangements for their future. Whether or not if there future was to be in resettlement or in Vietnam. So I think my main feeling now is that I am proud that HK acted in the way it did. No doubt most of it would appear harsh/ appear

harsh at the time to most of the Vietnamese involved but I think we tried hard to treat them as well as we could.

**I: Are there any particular incidence/moments that were most memorable to you?**

AA: Several really. In many ways the most moment I can remember is at this big camp on this air strip in the new territory. I don't think we really realised the depth of feeling and the possible enmity between some of the people between South and North. One night there was a riot there and the two sides got fighting and the result of that was that one of the buildings was burned down with about 30 people in side and they were all burnt to death.

**I: Did the fire take place because of the fight? Or was it intentional?**

AA: I think it was intentional. In the end I think some people were prosecuted for that. Till that point I don't think we quite realised how deep the feelings could be between the Southerners and Northerners. After that we tried to keep them separate. It wasn't completely possible.

**I: So the challenges and the complexity of the whole situation were just layers and I guess a lot of them will just unfold as you come along as no one would have expected that.**

AA: I think that the other two occasions were that. We had many thousand people on an island and a typhoon came to area and we had to move them all within the day to somewhere else. We never really had vacant accommodation and it was a great struggle to find accommodation for people on short notice, and the same thing happened in Saigon when there was a typhoon coming through because that was just a tented camp. So we had to move about 10, 000 people on very short notice.

**I: So where did you take them to?**

AA: Well fortunately for that second one we were building a new camp. It wasn't finished but at least the huts were there with roofs. So we moved them all there even though it wasn't quite ready for occupation.

**I: And one of the catastrophes that happened during that time that you had to cope with?**

AA: I don't think we had too many really big catastrophes. We certainly did get some trouble in some of the camps. There were a few riots but nothing that was as bad as the one I had described when the people got burnt to death. .. Yeah.

**I: That's a hard thing to deal with.**

AA: Yes. It was really awful.

AA: In the end HK was left with some people. We had to accept it. Who couldn't return to Vietnam for one reason or another and other countries weren't prepared to resettle. But there weren't very many. Maybe 1000 to 2000. There was one group of people in particular. Not a very large no. We called the ECVIIs. Which stood for the ex China Vietnamese Illegal Immigrants. I think that after the war in 1979 a lot of particularly ethnic Chinese in Vietnam had actually moved and resettled in China and had been there for some years. Then some of them really decided to join the boat people and tried to get resettled somewhere else. So we had quite a few of them in HK.

**I: Did you call them 'Boomerang'?**

AA: No. Laughs. We didn't. But they were a difficult group because whilst the Vietnamese Government said "Well they're not our responsibility. They've left they've gone to China. They're settled in China." And the Chinese Government said "Well no they're Vietnamese they're not Chinese." And so I think in the end we weren't able to return them.

**I: And also there were more that married locals and that didn't count either and I'm sure you would have had some of them.**

AA: Oh yes. I wasn't involved in the early days but I think in the very early days. Immediately before and after the fall of Saigon and South Vietnam a lot of people came through from Saigon to Hong Kong. Well as you know there were a lot of Cantonese people in Saigon and there were quite close ties to many of the people in Saigon and the

people of HK.... Family ties and a lot of the people made their own arrangement to come to HK in those days. They didn't come as boat people. They made their own arrangements to come to HK and were resettled in HK. And I think of the initial boat people who were mainly from the South and quite a lot of Chinese. HK decided to resettle quite a few of those.

**I: When you hear the term Vietnamese Boat People Refugees. What comes to your mind?**

AA: Ummn.. It's a sort of phrase of history which was/ I am glad has passed. There was a lot of sad things happened but I think a lot of good things happened as well.

**I: So in your career would you say that your experience with the Vietnamese people was the most challenging?**

AA: Yes. I think it was certainly one of the most challenging things I had to deal with.

**I: Is there anything you would like to add?**

AA: No I don't think so. I've been back to Vietnam only once or twice since the movement. It has changed above all recognition.

**I: Yes it has changed a lot. I didn't ask you before. How supportive was the government for you to do your job at that time**

AA: I think it was.... It was a crisis for the whole of HK government so I think on a whole we got fairly good support from everybody.

**I: What about your staff?**

AA: Yeah... I mean we had some excellent staff. I was very grateful to have people to help dealt with this.

**I: This would have been one of the most unusual situations. It's not just a quick fire to put out. It seemed to have drag on forever.**

AA: Yes. I think in some ways that was part of the problem that as far as the local population was concerned, – they felt that HK had done its bit in dealing with the influx of refugees in the 70's and the 80's. And they didn't really see why they should continue to have to go on in the 1990's. I think that was part of the feeling. And most of the people, then coming in predominantly from the North of Vietnam were fleeing hardship and not fleeing persecution.

**I: What were some of the challenges that you had in determining their status?**

AA: I think on a whole that went very well. We instituted quite a big system to do it. It was done initially by immigration officers. – The HK immigration department, and they were trained as to how they should apply the refugee criteria. It was a very big process/long process because there were a lot of people involved. So they did the initial determination and people could then appeal to a review tribunal. We established several boards to review cases that people wanted to appeal. We then finally the UNHCR vetoed and sometimes they came to a different opinion to us. But not often.

**I: Thank you very much for your time and for sharing your experience. I thank you for your good heart and endurance to cope with this. Because I am one of the receivers and I am forever grateful for people like yourself, for the governments in HK and Indonesia or all around the world for accepted [the Vietnamese refugees].**

AA: Well good. Ok thank you. I hope it all goes well. I'm sure it will.



## Bailey Chan

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Interviewee: Bailey Chan (BC)

Interviewer: (I)

6:00PM, Friday 13 September 2013, The T Hotel in Pok Fu Lam

**Interviewer (I):** The time now is 3.35pm on the 6th January 2013. Mr Bailey thank you very much for allowing me to talk to you. Could you please state your full name and where you were born?

Bailey Chan (BC): My name is Chan Luk Eng I was born in HK in 1941.

**I:** Thank you. I understand that you also worked with the Vietnamese boat people in the past. Can you please tell me how and when it all started?

BC: Yes. I was a government servant. I worked with the Vietnamese program in 1979. I remember it was in May 1979. At that time I was still on my holiday leave and I was called to be transferred to the security branch. There was a specially set up team called the Vietnamese Refugees Team. I joined the team to support/to deal with the influx of Vietnamese refugees.

**I:** What was it like for you the first day?

BC: Well the first day I was asked to go to the government 'godown'. Which is the place where the boat people/ so we called them the boat people arrived in HK. Afterwards they were in quarantine for 7 days and then they were sent to the reception centre. I visited then and I saw thousands of faces of people young and old in the hot summer. In fact I never have experienced in my life so many people/ so many desolate faces. However from their eyes I witnessed hope. They had hope and they had some sort of security there. I know my job is difficult and I wish I could fulfil my duties. On this visit I had the responsibility to accommodate and feed these refugees for their temporary stay in HK pending resettlement. The two principles. One is health the other is security and we cannot give them any treatment different than the HK people. We must secure their public health so that there is no spread of hygiene or disease through HK. I was to give them a secure place to stay and feed them in a nutrition way. That was my assignment.

**I:** So did you have any help?

BC: We had only a handful of staff and we had to decide our own rules as there is no preceding case. There was nothing to follow. We had to do everything in regards to how to feed them. We had to look for premises and at that time we used temporary places. As long as it was safe. We had to look for places that we could turn into accommodations. At the influx time we had to rent a factory building that was readymade. We had to put in toilets and find people to help.

**I:** So how did you go about it?

BC: Well at that time people were very helpful. We didn't ask for luxury things. We looked for simple things. We had to put in some places/ the refugee centres at the very beginning we didn't have proper toilets we had temporary toilets/latrines. People would come every day to collect the sewage and in one month or so we built proper toilets and all the staffs were very good they put in power supply/ water supply- everything. So in the end these camps could be fully functional.

**I: Where did you cook/to feed these boat people?**

BC: Now... There was problem. The kitchens were not big enough to cook for all these people. We could supply them only two meals a day. As a Christian when I visited the camps in the morning I understand the first meal was 11 or 12 and the evening meal was about 6. So from 6 in the evening to 11 in the morning there was a period of 12 hours. In my experience I would have breakfast at 7/8 in the morning and these refugees would have no breakfast in the morning till they receive their first meal at 11/12. So after visiting the camps for some time I suggested to the managerial staff can we supply them two pieces of bread in the morning so that they can have some food in the morning? So my boss said that we can have breads delivered. I think that is one of the achievements that I had to do with the people. So even in such crisis we were able to overcome/ think outside the box and to help them.

**I: How long were you in that position?**

BC: I left in 1984. During these 5 years... What did I learn? I learnt how to solve problems. I have met many problems which I never have had to deal with before. Every camp had different sorts of problems... Shortages with water supply; - I had to fix it. The power supply; the sewerage, the hygiene, everything. I can't imagine that I walked into the toilet one day and it was one foot deep with this foul substance. I had to call the right people to pump away this "thing". We had to put in some temporary toilets and make a conversion of the toilet facilities to overcome these things. Say in one refugee camp the camp is a large one and all the sewerage was thrown into one tent. Then we had to pump this away. So for two or three days the pump was not working "laughs". So I had to decide to put a pump between the pump and the stream to protect the flow on. So we had to use our imagination. Laughs.

So you can see that everything was temporary and we don't know the culture of the people in Vietnam in the village. They don't have these kinds of facilities they throw everything down the river. I learnt the Vietnamese are very genius in making things to boil water. They can use a piece of iron which they cut from a can. Then they use their two chopsticks then put a sheet there with a socket and it becomes a heater to boil water or to boil their drinks. Even for taking baths in the winter.

**I: Very creative**

BC: Yes very creative

**I: But worse than that?**

BC: That should not be allowed. But still they do this.

**I: How did you solve the problem with the shortness of water?**

BC: Ummn... That was a large problem. Because at that time we did not know the demand for water is so much in the summer time.

**I: Is this drinking water or water to wash?**

BC: It was used for everything. In HK if you turn on the tap you can drink from it. In the refugee camp we did provide boiled water but it is limited. It is for the elderly or for babies.

**I: So what about the power?**

BC: The power is for the lighting in the refugee camp when it is open. That is so that they can go out and work and cook for themselves. There was overloading and again we had to put in additional cables to make it workable or otherwise it would catch fire.

**I: What were some of the crises that you still remember?**

BC: I remember that there was once in a camp the medical staff reported to us there was people with skin problems in the camps. It was scabies. It was in the summer time and so we had to clean up all the camps and all the refugees, - young and old had to take baths. Administration of medication. Sterilisation of all the clothes. So I have to organise a cleaning party "laughs". But the hot water supply was not enough for everybody. So the elderly and the young children had their baths first. Then everybody else took their baths during the sunny time. It's a cold bath. Then one camp that was linked to the beach set up 20 or 30 big drums to sterilise their clothes. I had to organise

some new clothes for these people to change. Also the health officers....A team of health officers came to supply them with all their medication. So it was a big operation. All the people would line up naked and waited to take their baths.

**I: All naked?**

Joyce Chan (JC): I think HK was very good with this. In one week everything was cleaned.

**I: What was the cause?**

BC: Well... Health problems. In the winter it was cold and they did not wash. And the living conditions are crowded/ congested. So we had to supply them new clothes.

BC: Well. Every time we received calls. I don't say complaints more so reports. We had to settle them quickly. All of this was a crisis. So the Vietnamese program.. We had all these sick children and we had to act quickly to solve problems. As a catholic this program gave me understanding about the gospel teaching as is in Matthew 25. "Jesus said when I was in prison when I am naked will you clothe me? When I am hungry do u feed me?" I'm doing these things and I give them clothes and I give them shelter and also I still remember one thing. There was a departure program. The Americans decided to receive a certain number of refugees and they had to leave from the Philippines. So we had to transfer this large group of refugees from HK to Philippines by boat. So we had to transfer hundreds of people from camps to the dockyard. We had to provide a comfortable last stay in HK as they had a long journey from HK to Philippines.

**I: One week**

BC: Something like that. So we had to set up bunks so they could sleep.

**I: Do you mean bunks on the boat.**

BC: No in HK.

**I: Ok**

BC: So instead of lying on the floor

**I: Sorry I am confused here. They were transferred from the camp to the dockyard.**

BC: They had prepared to land their craft.

**I: So that particular night you had to set up bunks for them. And where did you get them from?**

BC: From the prison. Laughs. No they had the industry. They prepared all the bunks.

**I: And how many refugees were transported in that trip?**

BC: I think more than 500.

**I: And then you returned the bunk beds the next day?**

BC: We dismantled them and reassembled them.

**I: Was this just another example of something that came up at the last minute? And you then realised that these 500 people needed to sleep somewhere tonight.**

BC: Yes. They needed a bed.

**I: Wow. What else do you remember.**

BC: Yes. Then .... There were some incidents. There were people that when they were about to depart HK they wanted to enjoy themselves and they wanted to cause trouble. They were caught.

**I: Drinking?**

BC: Yes, drinking or shop lifting. And I said to myself "Why don't they behave. Their last two days."- Well they were celebrating their departure. Laughs. To some people it is unbelievable but they were celebrating and maybe they were so happy they forget. The experience is that I saw these happy faces when they were boarding the ship. Well I see their faces. Their lovely faces. After being in HK and when they departed they also had faith and hope. They were looking forward to a better life. HK provided them with all this kindness and concern. This is what I could say is that we were proud of them.

**I: So after you left did you miss it? Did you miss the job?**

BC: Well we were used to be transferred a hundred times. Every 3-5 years we had to change jobs. But I still remember all this.... I should say... Interesting. One thing was in 1982. There was a closed camp policy. After 1982 all the Vietnamese people had to be screened. And if they are refugees they are allowed to be resettled and if they are not they will be detained for repatriation. However when they enter HK they are allowed to continue their journey to somewhere else. We would help them to provide them with; food, water, fuel or repair their boat. So after the closed camp policy, one boat came with 14 refugees. So we allowed them to go. They wanted to continue their journey to Taiwan or the Philippines but their boat was broken. So we promised them to repair their boat. One week later and we provided them with two weeks rations. It is estimated that the boat trip to Philippines or Taiwan is about 2 weeks. We provided them with 2 weeks rations, water and fuel... some first aid medicine. This kind of thing happened a lot. As a layman I don't know navigation. But I gave them; a first aid kit, aspirin, a compass and give them a pack of cigarettes (laughs) to keep them happy. I got a police escort and asked them to head off. Some months later I went to the port and I hear they had arrived safely in the Philippines. I got the picture in HK. I didn't say goodbye or see you again. I said good luck to you and they arrived. I don't know how long it took but some months later I got the report that this boat of 14 landed safely in the Philippines. So it was a good memory in my life.

**I: Was their children among the 14 people?**

BC: No, no.

**I: Just men? Was there any women?**

BC: No. That's why I gave them cigarettes (laughs).

**I: When you started the assignment, did you know how long it was for?**

BC: At that time the situation was a little bit stable and pending departure. Through this no. of years I got the working experience which I never learnt before. Every night I had dreams about what would happen tomorrow. What I would have to face tomorrow? There are a no. of things every day. Every day we had to solve problems; [such as building a ramp] to transport an x-ray machine to the camp so refugees could have their chest x-rayed. Then we had to sort out the permit for that. Because with x rays this is radioactive and had come into HK under a special license.

**I: Did you take it from camp to camp?**

BC: It stayed in one camp and we brought in the refugees to use it. We handled many things. Sometimes the refugees wrote in letters; - "I want a picture of the governor".

**I: To send a complaint letter?**

BC: No. (Laughs) Because they say he allows them to come into HK. So they say I want to have his picture. Then we send from the records to get them a picture.

**I: What do they do with it?**

BC: To keep in their album. Just like you write to Obama and his office will give you his picture.



**I: Did you come into contact with any Vietnamese people directly?**

BC: No they were dealt with the camp managers. With the staff. We didn't stay in touch with them. From the start we had to do some education programs. We had to tell them how to use the toilet. How to manage head lice. Also show slides and visual aids so that they can be shown/ the proper use of the toilet/proper use of toilet paper. For the ladies the use of sanitary napkins. So that is from the start like an orientation. For some people it is unbelievable but it is a fact of life. We had to tell them/ so to speak what a modern life is. The majority of them came from villages. So they had to become used to a modern life.

**I: So they would throw trash everywhere?**

BC: Yes.

**I: Especially in the sewers.**

BC: Yes. Well I understand from the Vietnamese. In the villages they wouldn't use anything to clean their bottom. (Laughs)

**I: What would they use?**

BC: They would use a stick to clean and then we had to tell them this was a very primitive way.

**I: Wow. You never would have dreamt of doing that.**

BC: Yes (laughs). And again they would cook the rice and dry it and make wine. They were very creative.

**I: Did you ever get up in the morning and didn't feel like going to work?**

BC: No. No. No. I understood that every morning when I went to work I would have new challenges and I had something to learn from the day. At the end of the day I would say my prayer. I had a very blessed life and I didn't need to run away from the country. I had meals. I had this and that. I had my family and the Vietnamese had to leave their home. They were risking their lives with the boat journey. So I called my life a blessing.

**I: Do you think your religious faith had helped you through that job?**

BC: Yes. Yes. Yes. Apart from the blessing that I have. It gives me the opportunity to help. To care for the less fortunate. Although they have a temporary stay in HK we pray for them. We give them a place to stay, a piece of bread, a roof over their heads that is warm enough.

**I: So it was a meaningful period?**

BC: Yes a meaningful period. 5 years. Of my life. A special blessing. And when they are aboard the plane their faces were full of joy and hope.

**I: We are very lucky to have people like you around.**

BC: Well there was a whole team. Everybody shared this work for the people.

**I: But not everyone had the same mentality or feeling as you. How did they cope?**

BC: Everyone has their own... Lifestyle. Some may think that this is just my job I have to do it. Some say there is no alternative. When I am within this job I have to do this. For me,- This was my special assignment from God.... To care for these people. Even though they were difficult. They were a problem- the refugees.... But still we had to accept them.

**I: Do you still think about it from time to time?**

BC: Yes from time to time when I pass that area where there were refugee camps. (Laughs) I think this is where I was and the refugees were there. I still remember, - I solved the problem over there.

**I: When you hear the term Vietnamese boat people what is the first thing that comes to mind?**

BC: The first impression is unwelcome. At that time unwelcome. It still gives me some problems. Why me? Why should we receive them was my first impression. But after I visited the camps and after looking at their faces and their conditions on these small boats you realise they have gone through a very difficult journey. One or Two weeks on a very small boat from Vietnam to Hong Kong on the rough sea. I couldn't imagine how it would be if I was them; without a bath, without sufficient food or water for such a long journey. How could I survive? And then put myself in this position. Then why should I reject them. After this difficult period they should be welcomed with care. This is my reflection on the first day of my duty. It changed me completely.

**I: Why thank you very much. Thank you for everything you've done.**

BC: Well. I think that this has been a very valuable experience in my life. I can count on when the day I go to God I can count on this thing. (Laughs)

**I: Redeemed (Laughs)**

BC: You said to give them food (laughs)

**I: Yes. Is there anything else you'd like to add?**

BC: Yes. (Laughs). Well this is the day when one thing I want to add. When I was on duty I learned from the office when the people arrived in HK we put them in the quarantine for 7 days. Every day we fed them and this operation was called Operation Galilee. In the Bible it was the feeding of the 5,000. So we called this Operation Galilee.

**I: Who came up with that term?**

BC: I don't know.

**I: When you came to work this operation already existed? It was called Operation Galilee?**

BC: Yes. We were feeding thousands of people. It was wonderful.

**I: Ok should we finish?**

BC: Yes. Thank you for interviewing. Recalling to memory all these wonderful things.

**I: Thank you for sharing.**



## Bonnie Wong



Retired  
 Born on 21 May 1950 in Hong Kong  
 Resides in Hong Kong  
 Former Prison Officer  
 Interview date: 11 November 2012, Hong Kong

### Interviewer (I): Please tell me about your involvement with the Vietnamese refugees?

Bonnie Wong (BW): I am a Prison Officer by profession. In late 1978, there were some small boats coming to Hong Kong, which the Government needed to settle. Somehow the Department undertook the work to take care of those arrivals. Because the arrivals contained family members – men, women and children – when opening a center they needed some women to be on duty to take care of the women and children's side of things. So I was one of the women posted to run the newly set-up center for the Vietnamese arrivals. And in those days, women and children were housed in one section and men in the other section. So family units were separated in this way, and I was in charge of the female section.

### I: When you first started up the camps, how many refugees were there?

BW: At that time there were four dormitories, two dormitories for men and two for women and children. The place used to be an addiction treatment centre for young drug addicts who were below the age of 21.

### I: Was it difficult to manage them?

BW: It was different, because in running a prison there are lots of rules and standards to follow. But we were not in charge of children at all, except babies of female prisoners up to the age of three. So it was very different. It is a new experience and it is not like running a prison or a detention centre where everything was systematic for adults whom you expect to be able to understand the rules and follow them. But when it comes to family members, like young

children, it's a completely different picture altogether.

**I: Were they considered as prisoners?**

BW: No, they were not. They were people under detention. In other words, they can't go out to the community freely, but of course while they were under detention, they would need to be taken care of, clothed, fed, kept warm and that sort of thing, medical care etc.

**I: What were your day-to-day activities?**

BW: There cannot be a lot of activities. In a normal prison or detention centre, we had to provide work for the adults. But in those circumstances, our work involved space and also equipment and all the rest of it. So at that time, we couldn't really provide a workshop so to speak for them. So their daily activities were managed from when they woke up. We served breakfast first and afterwards they were expected to clean up their own dormitory and public areas. And then basically they were free. We would try to provide some sort of work for them, if they can [work], but at that time they were all being organised. It wasn't something that was very well organised, put it this way. For the children, we tried to set up some education classes for them with the Head of Voluntary organisations and that type of thing. We tried to meet the needs of all concerned as far as we could with our limited resources.

**I: What were your main duties in regards to the Vietnamese refugees?**

BW: The incident was custodial. We were there to keep them in[side]. But the word 'custodial' could mean 'providing them for 24 hours a day, their daily necessities for that period'. That is to say, they had to be fed; they needed accommodation, clothing and bedding etc. To provide them with the basic necessities of what a person needs in daily life.

**I: How many staff did you have supporting you then?**

BW: I have to check the records, but there were two sections – one for men and one for women. For the girls, I have to check the Departmental records as I cannot remember. But it was a reasonable number I think.

**I: How long were you in this position?**

BW: A few months only, but then another big boat came. The ship's name was Huey Fong, accommodating thousands of Vietnamese people. They arrived in Hong Kong and I think it was December 1978. And the Government decided to open a camp to house these people. And I was again assigned as one of the Officers to start that camp. So I got posted to that camp in January 1979 to start receiving the Vietnamese people from the ship, Huey Fong.

**I: On average, how long did each refugee stay in the detention centre?**

BW: We didn't know. At first, we thought they would be treated as refugees. And that eventually some country would take them [on]. But later, we found that wasn't the case, and some of them could be detained for years. And others could be taken to other countries as refugees. So as the situation developed and changed, some could be detained for quite a long time.

**I: Do you have any idea what the longest time a refugee could be there?**

BW: No sorry, I've lost count. But I think somebody would have some idea. But the first lot I believe, most of them have been resettled in other countries. It was the others that came later that encountered problems.

**I: So the second time when you were asked to work with Vietnamese refugees, was it easier for you because you had some experience?**

BW: It was a completely different thing again, because from what I understood, the Department was asked to take up the responsibility of running the camp. But our then Commissioner refused. I believe on the ground that the resources given to us were not good enough to run a decent place [for the refugees] to detain people. Because we firmly believed that in order to detain people, there is the need for sufficient facilities. You have to provide work for them, education for the children, physical activities for them and it's a whole range of activity. All these things need space, equipment and staff. But Government at that time was unable to provide all those resources. And I believe

later that it came to an agreement that the camp would be set up under the Policy Branch – the Security Branch. And be manned by joint forces, which were then the Prisons Department, which is now called Correctional Services Department, the Police and the Civil Aid Services.

The main division of job was that the Police would be responsible for security, basically perimeter security to prevent outbreaks etc. And the Civil Aid Services would be responsible for the distribution and allocation of dormitories and sleeping spaces, while we would be in charge of the internal management of the camp. So it was a joint effort of the three services under the Security Branch. So it was a completely new thing. First of all, there weren't any rules for the camps, nothing there for us to follow, we didn't know who the Authority was and what was allowed and not allowed. So we had to figure out these things and take their status into consideration, the children's needs and rights etc.

So at that time, we started drafting the basic rules and regulations for them. And other Departments would be responsible for drawing up the new scale for them, i.e. what they should have and the times etc. So basically, it was starting from scratch. We had to develop a new thing from our own experiences and taking into consideration the current circumstances. So it was a completely new thing.

**I: Were there any riots?**

BW: Not during my time, but eventually there were lots of riots and uprisings, or confrontations which came at a later date.

**I: How long were you involved with the Vietnamese refugees?**

BW: These were the times when I was on the frontline. But as time went by and I moved to other jobs, in one way or another, I got involved with the Central Administration for the Vietnamese [boat people]. Or until all the camps were so-called, the issue was basically finished in about 1997-98. So in twenty years, I was in some way or another involved, in overseeing the camps and things like that.

**I: You probably have had both fond and unpleasant memories in dealing with the refugees?**

BW: It cannot be said as fond or unpleasant. It was just part of the work, which was different and not something a Career Officer would accept.

## Second interview

.....

BW: Detention. People would associate it with the Middle Ages, where you would talk about brutality and those sorts of things, but it is not this at all. We are talking about handling a group of people who are not willing, or who may not necessarily be very happy to be handled by you. [They are in detention] Not of their own choice. But at the same time, you have to provide their daily basic necessities for them to go on in humane conditions.

When I say humane conditions, I mean the conditions of the current time of the local people at that time. It differs from country to country, race to race and nation to nation. A person from Cambodia, their basic conditions may not be the same as the basic conditions of someone from the United States. So we are talking about providing a person to live in a decent environment, appropriate at that time and place. And it is not a question of 'fond' or unpleasant memories. It is something that is completely different – we are handling a completely different category of people.

It's not like somebody who offended the Law whereby there are already laws and rules to govern their rights and otherwise. What you can or cannot do. But here, you have to basically work out, or figure out... for example the basic rights of children and the UN's rules of all these different categories of people. And then try to provide with your own resources [what is required] to meet these standards. These may not be met all the time, but you have to find help.

For example, in these camps, you have to involve voluntary organisations like classes for children that would be run by 'Save the Children' or some charitable organisations like Caritas to run educational classes. And you cannot force them to work, and it has to be on a voluntary basis. And also, in a word, you have a lot to handle, or a lot to learn and it was too busy to consider whether I liked it or whether it was pleasant or unpleasant. There were a lot of new things coming in that we had to pick up.

**I: Were there any incidents that stood out for you over the years that you still remember?**

BW: Oh yes. When you see the conditions when they come in, you feel very sorry for them, and at the same time feel very annoyed. For example, when food was being prepared, the whole group would come and snatch the food. They wouldn't queue up and that was annoying. We tried to distribute one portion to each person, and then suddenly the whole group of people... and the situation would run out of control. There were a couple of occasions when there was no food at all because it was all snatched. So the situation was eventually brought under control when food was being issued, I took a walk around the dormitories. And I saw some women and children playing in their dormitories. And I was surprised and asked them why they weren't queuing up for food. And the woman with two or three children said, 'somebody is taking the food for us'. And I asked who that was, whether it was her husband. She said her husband had died in the war and a 'friend' was lining up for food for her. And she couldn't tell me who this 'friend' was. So I asked her to come with me and went into the food issuing area. And I asked her to point out the man to me, and I made sure she got the food before I left. So I think sometimes you have to be careful, you just don't know what sort of things could exist in the camps.

And then you just by accident, sometimes when you walk around, you find out there might be something wrong. You have to take care of these things, such as another occasion where I saw a worried mother with a baby with a black face, a greyish complexion. I asked what was wrong with him, and the mother said he was very ill. I wasn't a medical staff and had no knowledge of medical conditions. I went to my senior who is a nurse by training and asked him to examine the baby. My senior said the baby was in a serious condition and needed to go to the hospital on Lan Tao Island. And then by our own understanding, I asked for the mother to be sent as well. Who had the right to sign a consent form for the baby? Not us, only the mother, so the mother had to go with the baby. And the baby was admitted, and he was in a critical condition. But he was eventually cured, and eventually made well. So that is the type of thing that happened in a camp [setting]. And the mother herself didn't really know [what was wrong]. She knew that her baby was ill, but she didn't really know how bad the condition was. And those were the type of things you had to look into, and the people running these detention centres have to take note of these [kinds of things]. And that's why we need medical staff and the rest of it; otherwise it's a matter of life [or death].

So of course there were also other types of confrontations involved, when they don't get some things, they try to protest and all those types of things. They would go on strike etc. There were also other types of things we had to confront them [with]. Another time, they wanted something – I forgot what their demand was. I went into the camp and as I was going to leave the camp, there were three rows of women and children blocking the exit and not allowing me to leave, and basically taking me hostage. I was quite upset and told some of the staff accommodating me to push me out. They used the women and children in front because the men, male staff would normally avoid coming into contact with the women. And if you come into contact, or confrontation with children, you would be in great trouble. But the fact that I am a woman as well, I didn't care about that. They just pushed me down. Then I went out of the camp, and that was a very unpleasant experience because if anything should develop, or intended to be a hostage situation that would leave a very bad taste in one's mouth. So there are bits and pieces of those [sorts of stories]. There are quite a lot of these [incidents].

Another time, there was a lot of fighting in the camp. So there was one dormitory that we believed were the instigators. So we kept them separate, while all the other dormitories feared we closed that dormitory, not allowing them to come out. At that time, the UNHCR came, wanting to inspect the camp. We told them there was trouble, but then they of course could come into the camp and look [around]. And I had to go into that so-called troubled dormitory. And so I went in. It was unpleasant at the time, but one of my staff asked me afterwards if I was scared. I answered that I was worried, but not overly worried because I didn't think I had done anything that would upset them so much that they would attack me. But that was quite an experience, walking into a camp with people who were segregated for creating trouble. But at that time, we didn't want to disturb the action of the UNHCR. We wanted them to try and settle the problem as quickly as possible. So those were the types of things we encountered. It was unpleasant at that time, but afterwards, it didn't really matter.

### **I: What were some of the trouble they [the refugees] caused? Could it be physical?**

BW: Yes, they could be very violent. And the initial trouble was created between North and South Vietnamese. It was something I couldn't understand, because how could they come out to find a life and why care about who comes from the North and who came from the South? They separated themselves so fiercely that they would always come into conflict and they would fight, often [leading to] a fatal attack. If they wanted to kill somebody, they would invariably succeed. And I thought about it, and they would easily fight. And I tried to find an explanation, and I thought my own thinking that there has been war for over twenty years. So when somebody just touches [you], you turn to see what happens. When we are not happy, we just start yelling. But if somebody touches them, they fear for their safety, for their life. Because that is how I'm trying to rationalise their actions. They fight and they are really fierce.

It's not like prisoners fighting, it's fist-fighting. They are not talking about wanting one's life. But when they

[the Vietnamese refugees] start fighting, it's a matter of killing. There were lots of killings in the camps, it was unbelievable. So I am trying to rationalise their behaviour. And I thought it was because they were growing up in violence. Once they confront something, their first reaction was to fight back.

That is what I think. If you are in a camp or war situation like that, that is your first reaction which is not a normal reaction from somebody who has been in peace all their life. There's lots of violence in the camps, so much that we had to separate the camps – one camp for North Vietnamese and another for South Vietnamese.

**I: Were there weapons involved?**

BW: They had lots of weapons. We provided them with water pipes in their camp. We provided them with bunks of which the frames were built with metal. They dismantled the metal [from the bunks] and their bunks wouldn't stand properly. So they pushed all their bunks together, so instead of having space between the bunks, they pushed them together and put them in a central place to support each other. So they took out some of the frames to [make] weapons. The weapons they produced were fatal weapons.

**I: Did they ever hurt the officers and the personnel on the Hong Kong side, or just among the Vietnamese?**

BW: Mostly the Vietnamese. Very rarely they attacked the officers on duty. And I can also understand that because we are talking about the officers on duty are not people who just control them. They also provide them with their daily necessities, like food and providing medical care, taking them to the hospital if they're not feeling well etc. So as human beings, some sort of relationship developed throughout this process. So basically, there is a basic understanding of one another. How an officer is like and whether he is a nasty one or not. And you can't really be nasty in a camp of thousands, when only ten and twenty [officers] are on duty. So there is quite a peaceful relationship between them and the officers, which is very important, because you are talking about detaining a number of people constantly – 24 hours – for a certain period of time. In the process, there are 'care' issues.

For example, if someone died, we had welfare officers on duty to take care of the other parts of the family, to see how their emotions are and give them the proper support and that type of thing. And throughout that process, some sort of relationship invariably developed. So the attack against officers will only develop when hatred develops. But there will be reasons I believe for them to dislike us. To dislike the policy and what we do. But I don't think there's any good reason for them to hate us for the extent of attacking [the officers], unless they wanted to hold us hostage for a purpose. Like the other incident I mentioned – if they wanted to hold you hostage for something, that is they wanted to hold you hostage for a purpose – not because they disliked a person, but if you're talking about attacking or harming that person it's a completely different story.

**I: Did they ever hold any other officers hostage?**

BW: Yes. There was one time they held one officer hostage, which was in High Island Detention Centre. And I think everybody in the whole of Hong Kong was very upset. Because they hurt one officer, they made long spears as a homemade weapon which they pierced through an officer's hand, disabling that officer's hand for life. And then they held one officer hostage. They were very unhappy with the fact that some of them had to be repatriated to Vietnam, those who had failed to be screened in as refugees. So that was a long night, we had to save the officer. The officer came out unhurt, but it was quite a scary experience. We were also worried about the officer's family as we had to keep in contact with the officer's family as well. Fortunately, the officer's father was very modest, saying he would trust us. He didn't give us too much trouble. And the officer himself when he came out was quite peaceful. There weren't a lot of grumbles in that hostage-taking situation.

**I: How long did they keep him for?**

BW: It happened about the time of the evening meal when it was being issued. And he was released in the early hours of the next day.

**I: Do you remember when it happened?**

BW: No, but there would be records showing that.

**I: What were the consequences to the refugees in such instances?**



BW: [There were]. No consequences. They were held in a dormitory. You cannot identify who held [the officer]. So basically this was the type of situation you couldn't get the culprits. Basically there was nothing except you had to be more careful next time. But that doesn't help the relationship between the staff and the refugees. It was more apprehension between the two parties, and they were more apprehensive and we needed to be more careful. Nothing really happened. You didn't get the actual culprits and couldn't punish the whole dormitory.

**I: Approximately how many people died in the camp during your time?**

BW: A lot. There were a lot of serious attacks and murders. They had water pipes and would sharpen one and stack them in one spot. And then they pulled them out, so that the blood would just drain out. And that was a very effective way of killing people. If they just pushed it in and let it stay, then probably it would be better, but they pulled [the water pipe] out so the blood would come out.

**I: Would the figures [of deaths] be in the tens or hundreds?**

BW: Hundreds at least, if not thousands. Not in one camp or any one period, but over the years.

**I: What happened to the bodies? Were they buried or cremated?**

BW: They were cremated. And then we would see what the family wanted. If they wanted to, they could keep the ashes and things.

**I: How did the people in the camp cope with losses like that?**

BW: The family members you mean?

**I: On both levels; the family members as well as the people in the camp.**

BW: It's funny because they didn't seem to mind, they seemed to accept this as a fact. They didn't seem to mind. Actually, the staff mainly was more [concerned]. They worried the staff more than [themselves]. They didn't appear to be very worried. At the time when it was North and South Vietnamese fighting, there would be a lot of [fighting]. When they were all classified as one region, then they didn't seem to care. They just thought it was a fact of life. That's how it appeared to me, not undue emotions coming [from them].

**I: Among the casualties, were there women and children?**

BW: No. They were [mostly] men. It appeared that there were some sorts of disgruntlement or arguments [between them]. Those who were attacked and killed were men, not women and children.

**I: Were there any casualties due to illnesses, or medical reasons?**

BW: Every now and then, yes. But then in all these casualties, we sent them to outside hospitals. For minor ailments, we had a hospital – what we called a sickbay in the camp – where they could stay and rest and we had doctors. In our own camps, meaning camps within Correctional Services buildings, we had our own medical offices. In every penal institution, we had the establishment for medical offices to be stationed in that penal institution. So if the camp was a conversion from the original correctional institution, there was a stationed medical officer ready. And these other camps, like Whitehead and High Island, we sometimes commissioned the medical officers from Red Cross and other places, other medical professionals to come in and take care of minor complaints from the residents. But for serious illnesses that happened in the middle of the night or during holidays, they were rushed out into the appropriate hospital.

**I: Were there any particular diseases that may affect a group of refugees or individual cases? [Were there] cases of malaria etc.?**

BW: No. The initial problem was hair lice. When they first arrived, hair lice were really bad. We had to set up a sanitation centre. They were kept there [initially], and then we had to take away the hair lice. That was the worst problem we had when we first had them.

**I: Would you like to take a break?**

BW: No. That is only a recollection of mine. I thought that it was a good idea for these things to be recorded, of what happened. But it's just a version of an officer's feelings and stories and encounters over the time when she worked with the Vietnamese migrants in Hong Kong. But there were a lot of things that at first I was very amazed. For instance, the birth rate in the camp was exceptionally high. So we had the family planning people in for birth control. They were not interested.

We tried to find out why they had funny theories [about birth]. They would say that if they gave birth to a child [in the camp], by the time the child was four years old he/she would be in kindergarten in the United States. I would question how they could know [for sure] they would be in the United States in four years' time. And when you talk about resettlement, they weren't interested in being resettled in any European countries, but only California [or other American states]. They didn't even want to go on board a flight. To us it was quite amazing and we wondered what was wrong with them. They only wanted [to go to] America.

**I: Did they get to go to the hospital to give birth?**

BW: Of course. They delivered in the hospital.

**I: Would the children receive residence or citizenship in Hong Kong?**

BW: No. Because of that, I believe that there is a special law or pass that they do not have that right. But of course they registered their birth here. Their birth registry would record their birth. All births were done in proper hospitals and even post-natal appointments, ante-natal appointments were done by the proper hospital clinics.

**I: What did the whole experience mean to you? How did it affect you?**

BW: It didn't affect me. You see that they make a lot of things from the material they get. And when you think about it, when you watch [them] and after you've been in the business long enough, you understand that it is human nature. For example if you read a book called 'Life and Death in Shanghai', it was written by a wife of an Ambassador who underwent cultural revolution in China. She went to prison for that, and describing her life in prison. And she was acquiring a lot of things that weren't allowed in the prisons. So you see that a person in a desperate situation will make things for themselves out of the materials available. And you'd be amazed at the type of things they can make. They can just come up with amazing things. You wouldn't imagine that you could make something like that, but when you are in a very deprived situation, you can make things like that. It's just normal. No matter what the education, it's not to say you are of a bad calibre so you would do things like that.

If the person desperately needs something, you would think of ways for them to make it out of the materials available to them at that time. I am not too upset with what they made out of the water pipes etc. available. I'm only sorry that they would damage [public property] because it would also affect their own safety and affect their daily life. But if you have been there long enough, you understand that for a lot of them, it's just human nature. So it's even more important that people in the business should really think about providing the necessities to people who are under detention or really deprived. It's very important I think.

**I: Is there anything else you would like to add?**

BW: Not particularly. I'm just relating an experience. There would be a lot of other frontline staff when the influx was getting more and more serious in the later years, there are other frontline staff who actually handled the riots and disturbances and hostage situations. They would have stories to tell about their own feelings. For some, there were times when there were a few officers handling a few thousand Vietnamese coming to attack them with spears. And they had to stand there because there was no alternative. Because they couldn't let them get out, so they had to stand there. And they probably had some sort of sentiments to tell.

**I: Thank you very much.**

BW: My pleasure.

### Third interview

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BW: And then when the screening policy came in, and then there were a lot of amazing things. Like two young

people falling in love and living together. And then one family was screened out as refugees so they had to move out to an open camp. But he wouldn't go because the girl was inside. Even moving them to an open camp could be an incident, you know. Then at the end of the day, we were asked to keep the person who wanted to stay voluntarily in a closed camp and his family could go to the open camp. So the young man or woman could stay. But when I took over as Assistant Commissioner, I said they had to go [the young man or woman in love] for the simple reason that we only could keep people under the authority of the law. We couldn't keep people because they were willing to stay inside. And also, if some attack happens and there is violence or injury, where is the responsibility? I didn't want to accept that responsibility. I mean, we had legal responsibilities to ensure their [the Vietnamese refugees'] safety. Any major injuries or death [that occurred] we would have to go through the death inquest, to go to the Coroner's Court. I had to be liable to the life and death of this person. I couldn't allow for someone who was willing to stay, to remain in camps like that. I said I wasn't going to accept them. So there were a lot of confrontations between Departments.

I said the Immigration Department should have taken care of them, I didn't care. I said they could take care of them and let the young man (or woman) leave because I wasn't interested in letting them stay in the camp. Because there were a lot of other issues that I personally believed we shouldn't have taken on. In case of serious injury or fatal incidents happening, there's just not the type of responsibility that should be imposed on [us] as Officers. So that, again, aroused some sort of argument, or debate between Departments on what to do on [a situation like that]. Because they are allowed to stay on humanitarian grounds, I said 'no way. These camps can only keep people under direction of the Law or Courts'. We couldn't keep anyone who was willing [or wanted] to stay in the centre. For example, what if a 'street sleeper' wanted to stay [in the detention centre]? Do I keep him in for humanitarian reasons? No way. So when there are multi-departmental efforts like this, you'd come into this type [of issue].

Each one [was] guarding their own Department's interests. And at the end of the day, the people would need to figure out what they wanted. But one would imagine that once given the status of refugees, you would want to leave. But that wasn't the case in this incident. So what was I supposed to do? I had to force somebody out to let them free. When you first heard about this, this was real life. It actually happened. Detention for the young couple was nothing. They wanted to be together, you see. So this is when all human nature comes in. You see the values of individuals and types of things like that.

BW: So in one day, we shipped out 3000 and received 3000. You get very tired, just watching, never mind about the job. I was totally exhausted when I was supervising the movement [of the refugees]. I don't know how the staff survived. Just supervising and watching. Unfortunately the officer who supervised that operation died. Otherwise I would get him to tell you the experience of how he shipped out 3000 and received 3000 in the same day.

**I: I'm sure in difficult times there are also a lot of heroes.**

BW: One of the funny stories – I consider funny – from the pier to the camp was a bit of a steep, winding road. So you put these people in, women, pregnant women, children on board. So how do you get them [up there]? You'd have to pack them into lorries. There's not sufficient safety [management principles] on them. So he packed the car and told them to squat them. And he pushed everybody together so it was like a packed in [tightly] so they were safe and there was no movement at all. That looks as if it is a harsh treatment. But that is only so the children don't get hurt. If they all squat down, the children were safe, the cars wouldn't rock. So in those times, one can think of amazing ways to get the job done. And I admired those officers very much. But he died of a sudden death. He went for a medical check-up and when he was in the lift of the hospital, he had a heart attack. He was actually in the hospital and wasn't safe even then.



## Carrie Yau

Interviewee: Carrie Yau (CY)

Interviewer: (I)

CY: I was Principal Assistant Secretary Security, of Security Branch. The Security Branch, being the Policy Branch and also the Coordination Body for the Vietnamese boat people. This means that I was given the task of coordinating accommodation for Vietnamese boat people, first and foremost, because the influx of Vietnamese was something beyond prediction. And there could be very large numbers coming into tiny Hong Kong. And we had to find accommodation [for them]. We resorted to building tents, or using army barracks to accommodate Vietnamese boat people. But because Hong Kong was in a typhoon zone, these kinds of temporary accommodation were not a sustainable way of housing Vietnamese boat people. So at least we had to provide some permanent accommodation in the form of – even if it means huts = something that wasn't just tents that would be blown away by the [winds]. But, as I said, because they were coming in large numbers, at the worst times, we even had to put people on ferries. We would just tie the ferries near the harbour, and after you would try to fill all the pier areas, and then you have to move beyond land and put them on ferries. So it was as desperate as that.

But I hope the Vietnamese boat people, although they had a very hard time in Hong Kong – we well appreciate that – they hadn't gotten the picture of Hong Kong. Hong Kong is just so tiny and short of space. Even our own local people are also, even today, speak about not enough housing. So this is the background to it all. So accommodation was one of my duties. And also, I came in a time when Government had put Vietnamese boat people under closed camps for a couple of years.

### I: What year was that?

CY: Well we have to look into the Chronology. It was about 1987, or '88. I tried to do the job at that time. And then I think we had a change of policy in 1989, around that time. But Mandatory Repatriation... so this is pre-Mandatory Repatriation that I moved into this job in trying to provide accommodation. Then I was asked to look at the policy side, which is looking for durable solutions when the Governor at that time – Sir David Wilson, now Lord Wilson – was trying to talk to the international community, saying that if they wanted Hong Kong to continue to be a port of first asylum for Vietnamese boat people, [the international community] will have to play [its] part too; in the sense of the international community taking them away. This was what was meant by 'port of first asylum'. They do not choose to come to Hong Kong. This is only a first port of call, with a view of going to America, Canada, Australia, European countries etc. And also, clearly the people coming into our place [Hong Kong], their profile was changing. Hitherto, Southern Vietnamese under a lot of persecution were coming to Hong Kong, and now a lot of them were actually economic migrants. They were trying to run away from starvation, and therefore wanting a better life.

These people, because of their status, foreign countries didn't want to take them. They also had a bit of fatigue. So if that was the case, we had to find a durable solution in terms of repatriating them back to North Vietnam. So therefore the second task was really to convince both the local and international community that we need durable solutions in terms of screening in genuine refugees, and screening out economic migrants. Economic migrants were sent back to their home country. Those who were really subject to a potential threat of persecution, they would be taken away by third countries. So, I was involved in the first mandatory repatriation exercise, which took place – again we have to check the dates in the Chronology Sequence of Events – but it took place in the middle of the night. So with hindsight, we shouldn't have done that. Because that shook the world, in the sense that [the international community said], 'you tried to just ship these people back home in the dark'.

So of course after the first exercise which shook the world in an exaggerated form, I'm saying, but indeed it hit international news, and there was a lot of outcry, because they would say 'why are you sending back these poor refugees to their country?' But that set the scene. It was a wake-up call for everybody, saying that, 'ok, either you take them all from the port of first asylum, and resettle them in the place that they want. But if you're not doing this,

we really need to sort out what to do next'. So the logical answer must be, those whom people don't want to take them away because they are only economic migrants must go back to Vietnam. So after that, of course the story went on, we tried voluntary repatriation until it dried up. Then we spoke about mandatory repatriation. Then we took the due track that those who voluntarily went home had an incentive package. Then they could have more money to take back home. Those who refused – but then had been screened out – would then be mandatorily repatriated.

So my third task, I remember, really was to make sure that people who were sent back home were given proper treatment. In other words, there was no mistreatment by the Vietnamese Authorities. So I recall I did bring a film crew to Vietnam, and tried to visit a few families and record what was happening to them. And it seemed that they were alright. And with these stories, we then tried to bring it back to the camps; to try to lure other people to go back home early [and be resettled]. As I said, those who were screened in as refugees were then put to open camps. And then those screened out would continue to be kept in closed camps, pending repatriation. But you could imagine, this was going to cause a lot of tension locally in Hong Kong. Namely, the residents had fear of these Vietnamese boat people coming out onto the streets, you know – Not knowing what to do, and they may upset the law and order of a society like Hong Kong. And then we had to do a lot of work.

So for those who were put into open camps, we had to get the NGO's [on board] – that's where Christian Action came to my help – to try to find employment for these people. In other words, pending resettlement to third countries, these people have got to be economically employed, so that they could build up their own confidence, prepare their new life; they have some skills to be prepared to go to a third country. So this was the other mission that we had. At this juncture, we worked with people like Christian Action, International Social Services etc. So this was basically what I was involved in. And because we had closed camps, although they are closed camps, it's for both humanitarian reasons and for security reasons that we also made sure that children got some education there, that we had NGO's working inside, we also had Medicin Sans Frontier (MSF) to look after their health. Because as I said Hong Kong didn't have enough doctors and nurses [to help out with the boat people]. So we really had to resort to asking International organisations to come and help out.

Looking back, I feel that Hong Kong also benefitted, because it was an eye-opening experience for Hong Kong community as a whole. It was a big international problem landing on our plate. It was putting all the civil servants to the test as to how to manage this problem, so that it didn't spill out to the rest of the community causing problems elsewhere. Because if that is the case, there would be [an] outcry [which would] make our life more difficult. Life was already difficult enough in those days, because the Local District Boards clearly wouldn't want to have a camp set up on their doorstep. But we had to do this. So we had to go to the district and tell them that if it was a closed camp, I had to assure the local community that it would be properly looked after by professional staff, and when we ran out of professional staff – namely our discipline staff – we had to get agencies to run our camps for us. In open camps, we had to assure them that there will be, again, people employed, they will also have their own ... they would behave in a sense that they wouldn't cause any disturbances to the local [people]. In fact, the reality was that, I'm sure some of the Vietnamese made friends with the local community, in looking back. But this is only with hindsight that this sort of thing happened. At this point in time, you really had to educate the community as to what this was about. You had to try and comfort them that this [sort of thing] was something that we are managing well.

### **I: How did you end up with the first group that returned to Vietnam? How was it?**

CY: The whole operation had to be very carefully masterminded. In the Security Bureau, of course there was myself, also the Refugee Coordinator – I remember it was Mr Mike Hansen as the Refugee Coordinator – and then the Secretary for Security, the late Mr Jeff Barnes. So we worked as a very close team, so I did all the detailed work in working with the police, how the operation should be carried out. And we also worked with the Correctional Services Department, because we had to select families from the camp as the first ones to be sent back.

Obviously, families would be easier to be handled than young men or single persons. So we had to carefully select what mix of people should be put on the first plane. And obviously, that would have to be the first plane back. Now, actually if you ask me, I don't know whether... there is probably no record of this. But as far as I recall, to charter a plane itself is difficult enough, [as] that [airline] happens to be Cathay Pacific, [which is] our own airline with whom we have a close working relationship. But when we approached them, they also had a problem, because they didn't want to tarnish the brand of the airline. They didn't want to be the 'bad guy' sending back these boat people to Vietnam, forcefully, onto the plane.

So we had to find a way to make sure that it was the Government, commissioning them to do it, so they wouldn't have to face up to a lot of Union problems at the end. So again, in looking back, there was a lot of work that went into planning the first operation. But as far as I was concerned, it worked out well because we did deliver at the end of the day. People put up a fight in front of the camera, but once they were on the plane, it became very uneventful. And people walked off from the plane once they landed in Hanoi without any crying or any fuss whatsoever.

**I: How many people were on that first flight?**

CY: Again, you have to check. We are talking about maybe, 10 or 20, at the most 30. I can't exactly remember the numbers. But it would be young couples, with maybe children. I can't remember. But it should be in the records. But the air hostesses were so nice. I mean they were from the hospitality industry, so when these people were on the plane, children were given little gift packets, and they were served tea and things like that. And they also sympathised with them, saying, 'these poor people have to go back to Hanoi without knowing about their future'. But all in all, as far as we are aware, it's not just sending people back home, but it is a durable solution in the sense that we've got monitors – namely UNHCR – continuing to be the monitoring agent. To make sure that people that have been sent back would not be subject to ill-treatment. So there was a system in place. That's how we managed things.

**I: How long did it take the Government of Hong Kong to negotiate with Hanoi about the repatriates?**

CY: Quite some time. It was a long process. The negotiation was Government to Government, at not only dealt with at the Hong Kong level but obviously at the UK level, supported by our Hong Kong team. You also had to negotiate with the UNHCR, because it had to be backed by the UNHCR. Unless it was backed by the UNHCR, the system was found to not be sustainable. It was in finding a durable solution. So before we implemented [the system], we made sure all parties were satisfied, that this is going to work out well in the long run. Hence as I said, it's not just the repatriation per se, but also the monitoring system behind [the system]. And also some extra money was to be given to these people, so they could go back home to start their own businesses etc. So they would be given a small allowance, not much. But it was one package. So I just hope that, again, because not all people can see the whole picture. So people probably still held a grudge, thinking, 'how come I was the first to be repatriated?' But after so many years, it will be interesting to find out whether or not they held a normal life. And thanks to the sort of decision of sending them back, what's the point of wasting your prime time in a closed camp doing nothing? Wasting your life away? So that was the whole concept behind the mandatory repatriation policy.

**I: When you were first appointed to this position, did you know what you were getting yourself into?**

CY: No! [Laughs] As I said, I belonged to the Administrative Officer grade, so of course I'm used to being posted to handle different jobs. We called these 'postings', every two years you had a posting so that you broadened your horizon of things. So we belonged to that – calling ourselves General Grades. We were expected to take on any task given to us as short notice. But when I was posted to the Security Branch, all this was at the evolving stage. People talked about it, the problem was getting bigger and hence we needed a new direction. So nobody knew what was going to be the next step. That's why I was very fortunate; I was put under a very steep learning curve when I stepped into that post. Because I had to open the camps under a new policy, to change from a 'closed camp policy' to an 'open camp policy', this needed a lot of explanation to the local community, and also [to the] international media.

**I: You mean you changed from open camps to closed camps?**

CY: No, [they changed] from closed camps to open camps. Because if you look at the whole story, you'll find that we moved from an open camp policy because too many people were coming. Therefore they changed it to a closed camp policy, hoping this would deter people from coming. Then, we found that this wasn't deterring people from coming. People were still coming, despite the fact that you had a closed camp policy. So we ended up running short of people to look after – a population held within the closed camp.

But imagine, if you lock up so many people within one place for so long, there was bound to be fighting, people getting bored and you have a lot of problems as you have seen in the museum. People would have to be innovative when making weapons etc. Who can blame them as they were so bored? So then, we realised this wasn't a solution so what was next. So from a closed camp, we moved to a closed and open camp policy. In other words, refugees were placed in an open camp. Economic migrants [on the other hand] were placed in closed camps to be repatriated. That was how the story goes.

**I: So your task was...?**

CY: My task was, when people are so used to closed camps, being a Hong Kong resident the Vietnamese boat people were really none of my business. Because all these people were kept in closed camps and looked after by the

Authorities. Now they [the Hong Kong residents] would worry that the camp next door would have Vietnamese boat people, taking the same bus, taking my jobs because they would come into the same job market. Then [this is how] the Hong Kong people would start to worry. So my job was then therefore was to calm them down. And say that, 'look, we're talking about not a lot of people. And eventually they will go home. But it's only in the interests of the whole community that they get jobs, they prepare themselves for resettlement etc.'

So I had to do the explanations, because I was one of the few Chinese-speaking Officials in the Security Branch, so I went on television a lot. The joke was, probably more than the Governor at that time. That's just a joke. But it's true, when you have these big forums where they debate and officials were sent to... It's just like Hyde Park. Do you know about Hyde Park? It's just like a place where you went to on a Sunday morning, where people grilled you and you have to provide answers. So I was there. And the Governor was watching me, because I only realised that when I then met the Governor on the following day, he said I did a good job. That was because after the Chinese forum, you were interviewed by the press in both English and Chinese. So the Governor was probably watching me, and when I said to the English media, saying that the Vietnamese people were just ordinary people. This was to calm people down. This was the sort of PR exercise I was handling. And I was very grateful, because I learned a lot. Because it was like a 'crash-course' on meeting [with] the media. We had very few people handling a very big problem, so we had to be multi-skilled in those things. And we did a lot of things.

**I: Did the challenge ever discourage you? Did you ever think of changing and doing something else?**

CY: Oh no, because as I said, we were Administrative Officers. So I got this posting, and if I survived for a few years, I would get another posting, hopefully a better one.

**I: How many years did you end up with this post?**

CY: Not too long actually, because it may be two-three years. A normal posting, that is. But as I said, it was very eventful during those two or three years.

**I: What were some of your most memorable incidents, or things that just stayed in your heart?**

CY: Well, as I said, when you first entered into the job, the people all appear as numbers. Because I had to tell my boss how many numbers had come [into Hong Kong]. So, 'x' number had to go on boats, and 'x' number had to be sent to the factories, and 'x' number sent to the tents. That was the only way you could manage the problem. But one day, when I was visiting these old people on a ferry, and there was a very compassionate Civil Aid Services (CAS) colleague. He showed me pictures and named people's names. So I realised we were not just handling numbers – we were handling people. So I was quite affected by his compassion.

Of course, all of us felt that this problem has caused us to work long hours and is so troublesome – that's the first feeling you had in the job. But in time, you feel that you are helping people. And I'm sure a lot of these frontline people tend to... I worked in the Bureau in a coordinating agency role; [in] playing this role. Unlike my colleagues who are on the frontline, feeding them, taking them to hospitals, resolving their problems on site and eventually seeing some of them being resettled, saying goodbye to them when they board a plane to America etc. They have a relationship with the people, which are easier than us, as bureaucrats, trying to coordinate things and handle numbers, making reports etc. But this was a job that you can't really just sit behind a desk. So I also then got to walk the camps. And I also got to talk to my colleagues and make sure whatever problems they had, we could help them to make their lives easier. So that's one thing.

What else? I think what touches my heart is really the spirit of people working together, my colleagues, the fact that they were all under all sorts of constraints, we had no money. What I should say is, my colleagues came from different departments – Correctional Services Department, Police, Medical Services – and their departments had probably said to tell the Security Branch they didn't have additional bodies, additional staff or additional money to handle this. So they were under pressure too. So what happened was, when I told them they had to do 'x', such as the refugees needed to be fed, medically taken care of etc., it's easy to say this sort of thing. But who was going to do it? So they would have to make do with whatever resources they had on the ground to do it. And they did deliver at the end of the day.

So that was something that I felt was really ... I forgot about this until one day when I was confronted with another disaster – SARS – which again, hit the world news. Hong Kong was a city that was hit by SARS and we had people dying of this unknown disease. So one day, I was doing my job and then the decision came that we had to remove people at short notice to a camp, because this building was at risk. That was called the 'Amoy Gardens', because



we still couldn't trace the source of this infection, and that people coming down with this disease, Government made this decision to remove them overnight to a camp. So it was during that exercise, when I opened that door, because I was having this meeting, and I was working with the very competent Eddy Chan, saying to Eddy that he had to round up the troops because it looked like we had a major operation to carry out in the next 24 hours. So when I opened the door after returning from a meeting at Government House, I found some of the 'old faces'. I then realised that these were very competent Officers who had gotten their training back in the training of the Vietnamese boat people days.

So I could trust them to undertake the operation – it was different, but they probably had the skills and integrity and confidence to do it well, without my telling them what to do. I couldn't anyway, because there was only 24 hours to get everything into place. So it was that kind of... that moment that has driven me to think that perhaps the 'Vietnamese boat people' was a story that was worth reporting. Because it is the civil servants who have handled such a crisis in that period, that was going to be repaid many years afterward to become very competent in fighting a new crisis. And indeed, I think Hong Kong came out, despite all the criticisms etc. Hong Kong did a good job in stopping the disease from spreading to other places. Not to say, stopping it in Hong Kong altogether. So it was critical that the collegiate spirit of people that makes a difference. So I'm sure the same would apply. Those young people, there would be bound to be young colleagues who fight SARS, they will tell me the story many years down the road; that they were able to fight this ex-crisis because they have the experience of fighting SARS. So I am telling you that, at least for my generation, we were able to fight SARS well, because we have very good people who have accumulated a lot of experience in handling the Vietnamese boat people.

**I: Almost every single person I have spoken to so far, they have all told me they were grateful for the experiences they gained from handling the Vietnamese boat people situation.**

CY: I am no different.

**I: I think everyone said they learned so much from this incident, and grew in leaps and bounds with their experiences career-wise. And by far, the most difficult part of their career. But none of them had regrets.**

CY: I think this is very genuine. This is something that... because it was so eventful during those couple of years that you had been doing that job. For other colleagues at that Departmental level...for Bonnie, I'm sure; she would have seen more incidents than I had. It was so very eventful, seeing how you would handle the infightings inside camps etc. But the fact that you can't put an army there to stop things, you have to think of some ways of self-management, so that they could introduce a self-management system. Almost like electing their own village representatives inside the camp, asking them to come to terms with each other. This was something that no boss, 'up there' would imagine being given that sort of direction. People would have to improvise on the ground to make ends meet. This was in fact what Talbot Bashall's story was all about. When I read your book, I was very touched. Although he [Talbot] was my senior and I never met him, he was saying exactly what was in our hearts.

**I: I now realise the situation with the Vietnamese boat people in Hong Kong was by far, the most complicated and unique [situation] compared to all other host countries in the region. And that's why I've shifted my focus to the situation in Hong Kong.**

CY: Because in other places, either they have the space, or they don't have typhoons. So they have some breathing space to sort things out. But in Hong Kong, you don't have the time or luxury or sorting things out. So as I said, the moment you thought you had solved a problem by housing them in tents, the next moment, you heard the observatory saying 'there's a typhoon coming that would blow away the tents'. So what would you do?

**I: Not only that, but in other parts of the region hosting the Vietnamese boat people, they didn't have the issue of North Vietnamese and South Vietnamese.**

CY: Really?

**I: Here, because Hong Kong is so close to Hanoi, to North Vietnam.**

CY: Has anybody introduced you to the term, 'coast-hopping'? The reason why we have so many North Vietnamese is because they could come to Hong Kong by coast-hopping. That means you do not need a very nice boat, but

just a boat that would carry you along the coast of Mainland China. You don't have to go into the open sea, in other words. And then you can make your way into Hong Kong.

**I: So there are so many more stories, but it's all fitting into the same theme. The complexity of the situation and the Government can easily be burned out. But you can't just give up, so you keep trying and you come up with different ways. And as soon as you know you can solve one thing, something else happens. So it's an amazing [thing].**

CY: Thinking back, I feel that it really is worth putting into the record in a sense that little Hong Kong is steering the world as to how to find a durable solution. It comes from Hong Kong, which is not even a country. But, you know, because we are so hard-pressed, so when you are hard-pressed, under that [pressure] in a situation, the intellectual plane is such that it would drive us into a direction of finding a durable solution. And in the end, it enters into the whole Vietnamese boat people history – durable solutions. Which, I think at that time, I underestimated the importance of them. 'Durable solutions' is no more than a word to me. But the reflection on this is, if you look at today, how many politicians and people look for durable solutions? Everything is about 'quick wins' or 'quick fixes'. But in those days, real leadership qualities were judged by those who really had both the heart and the vision to work things out in the long-run. And as far as this case is concerned, of course it is a problem that has dragged on for many years. But at least from that point onwards, it does start to try to take things to its logical end.

CY: I just hope that at the end of the day when the story is being told, people would realise that all the anguish at the time, or bad feelings – it's understandable. But in looking back, there should be better appreciation on any party's side to look at the story from another plane. It's a humanitarian problem that has happened. But at the same time, it's a problem that has put people to the test at all sides. The Vietnamese boat people become tougher having gone through the saga, we as civil servants become more competent because of all these tests we have gone through, the leadership – those who have to tackle the international politics or what not – also rise to the challenge. And Hong Kong also, for the first time, gets onto the international map. And then people get to know about Hong Kong, because of this problem. So all this is quite meaningful to me in looking back.

**I: Everyone has their different ways of looking at it, based on their experiences but [also] looking at it as a whole. I think the main part that stood out for both sides of the fence was the humanitarian aspect of it.**

CY: And we learned a lot. Because had there not been the Vietnamese boat people, Hong Kong people would be very parochial, living in a 'little village' mentality of our own. Again, I said this with evidence because when SARS hit us, I was very worried when another boatload of people were calling into Hong Kong, when they in fact should stop in China rather than coming into Hong Kong. They were suspected of SARS, and they wanted to receive treatment in Hong Kong. So therefore I was thinking that maybe the Hong Kong people would feel angry, saying 'why should we be doing this when we have the whole problem in front of us?' But when I tried to explain to the community, saying that we are under international obligation to take these sea-faring people in, to treat them if they have a problem, people accepted that.

So the next day when you opened the newspaper, when the reporters tried to prompt people into saying that we shouldn't do this, you had a common man on the street saying, 'we have an international obligation to take these people in!' So again, in looking back, everything comes. So Hong Kong has become such a... because of the free-flow of information and this learning experience and this humanitarian side of things is really international business, it raises the quality of the [Hong Kong] community. At the end of the day, this is something quite accidental. And not every city has the privilege of having this baptism of fire, I would say.

**I: I was just, extremely surprised when I read the background and how small and overcrowded Hong Kong was. And as much as you get the luxury of handling them one group at a time, they all just come in every day. It's [relentless].**

CY: And again, you cannot just cram them into any place. We have standards to meet. So we really have to provide something decent. [For example] making sure there are blankets, making sure there are napkins for both babies and ladies – that is very real. You have to tackle that on the ground.

**I: Is there anything else?**

CY: That's it for the time being. As I said, it was not very well-organised but it was worth looking back. But my involvement was really, very... you won't miss it. Because I was asked to produce Eco papers – some six or seven of them in a series – within a very short period of time. To the extent that my personal Secretary after that [left] for another posting because it was too much work. But that was because the problem was so big, that the Governor at the time had decided that we must change the policy.

Mandatory repatriation was the way to go. So that was the time when I was involved. So when you check the timeline, you'll find where I was. I remember it was after the birth of my son, so that's why I can remember it was 1988-89. And fortunately I have a very good domestic helper. So she literally looked after the family for me when I had to handle this very tough job.

**I: I thank you for sharing, and I also would like to take this opportunity to thank you personally for being there for the Vietnamese boat people.**

CY: As I said, like my colleagues, it was a privilege in looking back.



## Cheung-Ang Siew Mei, JP



Occupation: Executive Director – Christian Action  
 Born: 3 March 1960, Malaysia  
 Resides: Hong Kong  
 Interview date: 14 September 2013, Hong Kong

From 1983 to 1997, from the UK to Hong Kong, Cheung-Ang Siew Mei had worked with thousands of Vietnamese boat people. She had managed a number of important programs to assist Vietnamese boat people in open camps, closed camps, transit camps and to detention centres. She had held key positions with various organizations such as: Save the Children, the UN and Hong Kong Christian Aid for Refugees.

### History of working with Vietnamese boat people

#### 1st position – 1983

I was in the UK when I decided not to return to Malaysia, instead I stayed and pursued my calling in life as a Christian. I felt that God wanted me to be involved with justice and compassionate work. There was an opening available to assist Vietnamese boat people resettle in Liverpool. It was a full time volunteer job, and I was paid 50 pence, as lunch money every day and a free bus pass.

My job was to make them feel welcome, get them furniture, take them to the doctors' and take their children to school, bring them to hospital and basically act as a translator. That's how I began, and I was acquainted with Vietnamese friends for three years.

Then I got married and came to Hong Kong.

## 2nd position – 1986

While in Hong Kong, I was very attracted to the Vietnamese refugee camps for the fact that these were the camps where the people and individuals I had served had come from. Again, I felt the calling to go and serve in the camps. I started working in Tuen Mun camp. It was a closed camp and I worked as English teacher, and the first agency I worked with was 'Save the Children'. In the camp, people were very friendly, the children were very happy to have me, a young teacher and with Asian origin.

I spent five days a week in the school. I would start at 8:30am and finish about 2pm, and then I would stay back until 4-5pm socialising with them. I created a room where they could just come and hang out. Sometimes I brought them some biscuits or something to munch.

I played the guitar and so I brought music to the camp. So I stayed back and brought them guitars and we sang songs and one of their favourites was '500 miles'. And so it was really nice and I was very happy that part of my interests and talent could get transferred to children. And when the whole camp was singing 'a hundred miles, a hundred miles', you know, it was a very special feeling, because there's nothing to do in the camps. So when they could sing and learn to play the guitar, it brought about a different atmosphere in the camp.

I was only 26 then, there wasn't much of an age gap between the students and me, so I really enjoyed my time there. Of course I taught other things apart from English. And I became their friend and they could talk to me.

But I can't help feeling the sense of a waste of a life. I remember I was very mean to a kid, who didn't come to school, and I went to his unit in the camp and looked for him, and I felt so angry. I remember this little boy named Toi. I said to him, 'Toi, why aren't you coming to school to learn something? What can you do here but eat, sleep, play?'

## 3rd position – 1986

After six months, I was head-hunted by Mr Farrow from the Hong Kong Christian Aid for Refugees, which is now Christian Action. He asked me to run an orientation program to orientate Vietnamese before they go to the UK. For a few months I provided orientation classes telling the refugees what to expect, and I had contact with the people in England, so that I would tell them up to the point of who would be meeting them in England.

## 4th position – 1987

Soon I was given another project that was funded by the Rotary of Victoria. This was a bigger and one of my milestone projects. In this program, my job was to get the young people away from the factories. They were very talented but in the camp they were losing interest and so they would go to the factories to earn a living. Working in the factories was a big thing at that time from 1986 to 1989 because there was a shortage of labour, and the Vietnamese refugees could earn a lot of money.

During that time, the young people were either gone to the factories or become a 'pickpocket' or work as a coolie. My job was to steer them away from those directions. I placed them as interns with the Rotary Club members. They would be going to an Architecture firm and they would learn to be a trainee draftsman or a receptionist. Or put them in a hotel where they could become a bellboy or a waiter. In the meantime, I taught them manners, etiquette, basic English and basic computing skills etc.

I would go to Apple Computer and get the Executives to become volunteers and they would bring their Macintosh – at that time Mac was very big. And they would bring their Macs and teach them to do basic programming. The young refugees really enjoyed that because the people that came with them were very intelligent. Then the Rotary Club members would offer them jobs. "The Rotary Club of Victoria, who sponsored the project received an award for it being one of a great and successful project."

## 5th position – 1988

A year later, there were changes in the policies, closed camps would be diminished and Vietnamese boat people were to be kept in either open camps or detention centres. Then there was pressure to find jobs for the Vietnamese refugees plus the pressures from the community and local district offices that against the idea of having Vietnamese people come out of the camps. So the UN picked me to manage the project. That's when I knew Carrie Yau, she was the Principal Assistant Secretary and she needed to push this project. There were a lot of barriers; one of the barriers was that the Vietnamese refugees couldn't leave the camps unless they had a job, and sometimes if they didn't have money they would commit crime.

But thank God! God is very kind, it was the labour shortage. So I would find busloads of jobs in bra-making factories, jeans-making factories, making of materials and those sorts of factories. And all sorts of people would come knocking on my door saying they wanted to hire Vietnamese refugees. So I was like a placement agency and I had teams of people placed in the camps for the recruitment process and then I organised volunteers to do orientation about things like the toilets and how to use them – i.e. the toilets outside aren't like those in the camp, this is how you use it, don't squat on it, sit on it [laughs].

All those little things we would take for granted!

I was very overworked and overwhelmed, because I was very young – in my 20's – and having to face all the politics of the Districts, the UNHCR and the Correctional Services Department (CSD) etc. But I guess I'm not the stereotyped Social Worker, so I got on quite well with all parties. I was well-received by the Vietnamese, the CSD, the Government, the local district councillors. So they would always joke and push me forward because I was such a stranger and they didn't know what to expect. And I would always ask very direct questions and answer very directly because I wasn't afraid to put forward some points.

I negotiated with the factories to sent buses to the camp to pick up Vietnamese refugees to their factories to work. Many of the refugees know basic Chinese; especially those who lived in the closed camps watched Chinese Television. We gave them orientation, with basic Chinese training. I also hired some of the young people I trained before to be the translators and interpreters.

"It was too big for me probably, but that's God's will. And so I headed a team of people to find jobs for all these refugees. I think there were probably 8000-10000 people in the closed camps."

After one year I worked so hard I had an ulcer and had to stop.

#### 6th position – 1992 – 1997

Based on my previous successful track records, I was once again recruited by Hong Kong Christian Aid for Refugees to be a Project Manager. The new project was placement and the training, and cottage industry projects in all of the camps.

I was managing multiple camps all in the detention centres. Each camp would have a team run by us; cottage industry and training programs were also run by us.

The idea was to keep the Vietnamese boat people occupied, the rationale was that if they were occupied they wouldn't fight. So the UN funded it – of course with Hong Kong money. We had cross-stitching for the women, we recruited small factories to make headbands and handicraft, and they even did some assembly of small gadgets. We taught them sewing and tailoring, computer classes and English. Repatriation was inevitable, so we taught them skills to survive. Because we knew Vietnam would boom and hotels would be coming up. We set up mini-hotel training courses, and gave them hospitality training. We also provided Hair-cutting lessons so when they went back they could open a shop. The programs were very positive. In fact, some of the refugees went on to become good tailors and they opened their own shops.

At that time EU was given out some grants. So we taught some of the Vietnamese basic accounting and how to write business plans, so they can apply for funding.

I quickly became Program Director, and then in a very short time, I became Director of the Agency, in November '92. I then moved to a more strategic role and got some very good people ran the programs. One of them now is Head of some Regional Division in the UK. And Nigel Priess was my Manager during this EU project and training, and now he's one of the Immigration Directors in Australia.

We ran programs for two groups of refugees; one was in the open camps and one was in the detention centres. We ran the pregnant women's program next to Kai Tai camp, and we also had a dental program, a program for unaccompanied minors.

#### **Q: What can you tell me about detention centres?**

A: I have to say that people can get exploited easily in the detention centres. I think in the past they were somehow smuggling in drugs and you would hear stories of even UN Officers exploiting the refugees, and even CSD Officers exploiting the women, and the Big Brothers etc. But all that is hearsay. I can't help but realise they are very vulnerable in the detention centres. In the camps, it's all concrete the huts are hot, there's no privacy, there might be a whole

family in one bunk with someone else in the bunk above, there's no dignity. For me this was the issue.

**Q: Was it lack of facilities or a deterrent?**

A: I think there's a lack of facility. They really had to build the new places from scratch; they had to make it 'prison-like' but it wasn't a prison. It was very expensive when a whole lot of people need to be hired to guard the refugees, feed them, school them, and create activities for them. And Hong Kong being so small, and with the Hong Kong people themselves living in small places, it's understandable but not acceptable. So they don't have a choice but to get Prison Officers to look after the refugees.

**Q: Did you ever witness any riot in detention camps?**

A: We were concerned that people were taken against their own will. So the Government allowed us to monitor the process. We were the first agency to volunteer, because it was very political. People don't like the forced repatriation. But for us, we knew it was inevitable. So we made sure it wasn't violent or unfair. Of course we had to chase them because they were running and hiding.

The most memorable thing I saw with my own eyes was the forced repatriation at Whitehead Detention Centre. We were up in a high place, looking down and writing notes. The Police were chasing them because they didn't want to go back. Some of them had to be carried or dragged out. And so it wasn't very nice to witness.

One of my staff members, my manager – his name was Adam Voysey – one day he came back and was crying because he said he didn't want to see these things. He spent a lot of time at the front line, and one time he witnessed where they threw tear gas.

I went with the UN team to Vietnam to see for myself that the Vietnamese refugees are not persecuted. We had a list of people we would visit, by surprise; some were the people who had received grants. Most of them were doing ok. So after my trip, I was quite at peace for accepting the fact that some of them have to return to Vietnam.

**Q: Was there any moment when you thought you have had enough and wanted to quit?**

A: I think when I had an ulcer. Obviously it was physically hurting and that was because I was so young and had so much responsibility and so many demands. As personality, I just wanted to get it done quickly. And how quickly can you get it done when the community is so large? I had no training, but yet after two years away, I kind of missed it. I went back to my mentor – the guy who hired me for the Rotary program. He asked me to come back, and I believe God was saying to me to go back, and because there was some corruption. I didn't like the idea of money not being spent properly on the refugees; exploiting the vulnerable and the weak. And I agreed to go back and I'm glad I did. And shortly afterwards I got the job as Director, which lasted until now.

**Q: What were some of your most memorable moments or stories?**

A: A story about my predecessor, whom I've never met. He set up Hong Kong Christian Refugees. One day a boat came, this man emptied the vocational centre to allow them the Vietnamese refugees to stay there. So one time at the training, the Director of the Hong Kong Christian Service mentioned him and said that, 'you can't do things the same way; you have to change them in every era'. He said that his predecessor put all the refugees into the vocational training centre; you can't do that now because you have to think of Health and Safety etc.

It was the first time in my life in Liverpool that I encountered refugees but I had no idea about their experiences.

Once, a young man said to me, with no emotion, 'I was forced to fight the Chinese on the border and we had to throw a grenade and we would see body parts flying everywhere. And then we were caught, and we had to fight with the Chinese against the Vietnamese.'

It was horrendous. I mean, he didn't die, but he saw all the horrors of war and was caught and had to fight on the other side. And there he was in Liverpool which is cold and unfriendly and nothing like Vietnam.

One of the sad things, from my observation was that single men and single women were kept in separate sections. It was so artificial, but if they didn't do it that way there would be a lot of problems. And that situation created some homosexuals. It wasn't even talked about. But it was there, because at the time, it was a very 'hush hush' phenomenon. It was just too bad and such a tragedy that they had to flee Vietnam for whatever reason. And for me, I don't judge economic migrants. Because I think we are all economic migrants of some sort when we go to another



country to find a job or resettle. I mean, Hong Kong people go to Canada, they migrate there. We are all economic migrants. But even right now, in Australia they are so hostile towards people who want to have a better life. There is nothing wrong with wanting to have a better life. There is nothing wrong with wanting to run away from Iran or Afghanistan or anywhere.

**Q: Do you think the Government could have handled it differently?**

A: To receive so many people, I think that the Hong Kong Government is one of the most decent Governments in Asia. They didn't turn anybody away, they didn't shoot at anybody.

One thing regarding politics, the reality is in Hong Kong a lot of Mainland Chinese people wanted to come over, and the Government was so strict about it, if they were caught crossing the border, they were detained and repatriated. Even right now, the Government's hands are tied. They cannot be too kind to refugees from all over the world, whereas they have very strict rules for their own people. For the dilemma that they are in, the Government handled it very well. They are kicking out somebody's cousin or friend – your own people – yet you are expected to embrace and give others a fine life. It's very complex.

More credit should be given to the Hong Kong Government and the people who looked after them – or even the people who monitored them. There are bound to be 'bad hats' everywhere. But I do believe the majority of Correctional Services staff was ordinary and kind people.

**Q: What was it like for you at the end?**

A: In a way I was relieved that it came to an end.

**Q: What was this whole experience with the Vietnamese boat people mean to you?**

A: I did not choose any communities – God chose the communities, and I think that was a time in history when human suffering was very prominent, and then the running away from persecution. So I felt happy that I had a part to play in alleviating the suffering and providing a helping hand to people who had gone through so much.



Dai Le



[Listen to Dai Le's interview on ABC Radio National](#)





## Diem Nguyen

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Interview date: 03 December 2012  
Time: 3:00 pm  
Place: Residence in Adelaide, QLD  
Name: Nguyen Thi Diem  
DOB: 01 May 1957  
Place of birth: Quang Nam, Vietnam

Prior to leaving Vietnam, Nguyen worked at a local garment factory.

Nguyen and her husband left VN in June 1982. There were 13 people on the boat, the journey took 3 days 2 nights and was uneventful.

As they were approaching HK her boat met with a Chinese fishing boat. The fishermen gave them food and guided them to the dockyard.

After arrival, they spent three days at the dockyard for quarantine. At night, they went back to their boat to sleep.

After quarantine, they were taken to Jubilee refugee camp. After they settled down, Nguyen and husband found

works at various factories. They learnt a few words in Chinese from friends to help them find works and to navigate themselves around by buses.

Several months later, Nguyen was pregnant with their first child so she stopped working.

Nguyen received regular maternity checkups and delivery at a local clinic. She described her childbirth experience in HK was normal.

Two years later, Nguyen, her husband and their new baby left HK to resettle in Australia.

Overall, Nguyen said that her experience in HK as a refugee was nice and she appreciates the HK Government and the people for their kind hospitality.



## Duc Truong

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Interview date: 5 August 2015  
Time: 4:45 pm  
Place: Residence in Brisbane, QLD  
Name: Truong Minh Duc  
DOB: 1958  
Place of birth: Da Nang, Vietnam

Truong left Vietnam with his wife in the evening of 22 Aug 1982 from Da Nang at the Tien Sa Port. The port was a military based; his group paid a senior officer to allow them to use the port to depart.

There were 24 of them, including a child, 2 teenagers, 3 women and 18 men. They left on a very small riverboat 8 m by 1.5 m. They brought plenty of drinking water but only 10 kilogram of rice because they did not want to draw attention from the guards.

They chose to go to Hong Kong (HK) because from Da Nang it was a shorter distance and safer than going to South East Asia, in term of pirate attacks. Furthermore, they knew that the authorities from China would not return them to Vietnam because after the Vietnam-China conflict in 1979 there was not diplomatic relationship between the two countries.

The whole journey took 9 days and 9 nights. First, they arrived in Macao. They were given food and shelter while their boat was being fixed. Two days later local authority in Macao sent them out and directed them toward HK.

Hours later, they arrived in HK, the police towed our boat into the dockyard. Truong said that the policemen who received his group were hostile. Although Truong did not understand the language, he felt unwelcome by the way the policemen handled him and his group.

They stayed on the dockyard for two days and then were taken to Chi Ma Wan closed-centre in Lantau island. When they left Vietnam, Truong and his group were not aware of the new 'closed-camp' policy in HK.

Truong described the camp as about the size of a football field, and at that time it held about 4,000 VBP. The camp had nine huts, a kitchen, a medical clinic, toilets and a basketball court.

At Chi Ma Wan, they stayed in one of the 9 huts that had nothing but rows of three-tier bunk beds. Families with children were assigned the lower bunks, single females were assigned the middle bunks and single males stayed on the top bunks.

Truong and his wife arrived in HK on 22 August with only one set of clothes they were wearing, and they wore the same clothes until October when they received clothes and blankets from the government. Truong described that each time he washed his clothes, he would leave his shirt out to dry but had to wear the wet pants and stayed out in the sun until they dried. He said that it was much more difficult for the women in this situation.

According to Truong, while in Chi Ma Wan, the refugees were managed by the police and the same prison regulations were applied to the refugees. The only differences were they were allowed to go to temple or church and they were given English lessons.

When they first arrived at Chi Ma Wan, Truong got a job at the laundry room where the police uniforms were washed and prepared. Later, he was working as an electrician to fix electrical problem throughout the camp and accommodations of the policemen. Truong said that the payment were insignificant but he was grateful to have something to do. His monthly payment was enough to buy a few packs of cigarettes and some candies for his wife.

Truong recalled there were lots of fights in the camp between North Vietnamese and South Vietnamese. The ratio of the two groups in the camp was about 50:50. Truong explained about the level of the fights, small ones involved two to four people, medium ones involved about 20 to 30 and large ones literally involved everyone. The small fights occurred about every few days, the medium fights about every few weeks and the large ones about every two months. He said, "when we go to the toilets, we never go alone, always a group of twenty to thirty people because if we walk around the camp alone, we could easily be picked on by the Northerners for no particular reasons.

Truong said his worst memory in HK occurred the day after his wife gave birth to their baby girl by cesarean section. A nurse at the public hospital pushed her from behind and told her to walk down stairs with the baby in her arms from the seventh floor, while she was in great pain with blood dripping down her legs. There were elevators but she was not allowed to use them.

Fourteen months later, the Australian Immigration department interviewed Truong and his wife, and at the end of the interview he saw the word 'Accept' written on his file. He was very happy. Six months after the interview, they were transferred to a transit camp where they stayed for 2 months to go through health check-up and the departure process. They arrived in Australia on 9 May 1984.

Reflecting on the experience as refugees, there were some individuals who treated them unkindly and looked down on them. However, as a whole, Truong said that the British HK Government's policy was humanitarian, "I am grateful that the government accepted us, the VBP, gave us shelters and helped us find resettlement."



## Eddy Chan

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Interviewee: Eddy Chan (EC)

Interviewer: (I)

2:45pm, Monday 7 January 2013, Office of the Vocational Training Centre, Wan Chai

**I: Mr Chan, thank you for giving me your time. Can you please state your full name?**

EC: My name is Eddy Chan and I am now retired. I used to work for the Hong Kong Government, and I was, at one time, the Principal Assistant Secretary, dealing with the [problem of the] Vietnamese migrants.

**I: When and where were you born?**

EC: I was born in Hong Kong in 1950.

**I: What year did you start to get involved with the Vietnamese refugees?**

EC: I think if my memory serves me right, it would be around 1991 – '92. I think it would be around that time if I'm correct.

**I: And what was your role at that time?**

EC: My main duty at that time when I first reported to the Security Branch was that I would be responsible for providing accommodation for the Vietnamese refugees coming to our shores. And also the management of the camps. Later on after about a year in that job, my duties had change and I was then responsible for the repatriation of those Vietnamese migrants who were not eligible for refugee status. And they were sent home under the comprehensive plan of action as agreed by the United Nations. So I think I had two jobs during that period of time. The first one was to provide accommodation for the Vietnamese refugees; the second one was for the repatriation.

**I: And both of those duties were within the period '91-92?**

EC: It was between 91 and 94. About 94, I was transferred to a different Government department. So I was with the Security Branch for about 3 years.

**I: Both of those duties were apparently two of the most challenging ones, so you probably had a very difficult three or four year [period]?**

EC: Yes, I would actually say that if I look back now in my career as a civil servant, or an Administrative Officer [in the Government], it was the hardest job that I ever came across.

**I: Could you share with me some of the challenges you had experienced?**

EC: First of all, it was the numbers of people coming to our shores on a daily basis. Every day, when I woke up, the first thing that came to my mind was how many arrivals. On a daily basis, 100, 200, 300, 400 [arrivals].... So on a daily basis; you have to consider where you want to put the refugees. Do we have enough space? And of course the second problem is that we don't have a lot of land. So we had to put all our efforts into looking for suitable places for where we could build the camps to accommodate the Vietnamese refugees coming to our shores on a daily basis. So that was a very, very difficult job. We would have to look at different camps to look at what the capacities were. Were there any individual camps capable for expansion? Could we build more tents, could we build more huts so we



could accommodate more people? Also, what makes it much more difficult was that at one point, we had to separate the Northern Vietnamese and the Southern Vietnamese. Once you mix the South Vietnamese and the Northern Vietnamese, there would be trouble. There would be fighting, there would be riots and there would be disturbances.

If there is a camp which is specifically designed for Southern Vietnamese, and it has spare accommodation, you cannot use it to accommodate the Northern Vietnamese. So you see the challenge. You have to find suitable accommodation to accommodate different groups of people, to avoid the rival groups from fighting and disturbances. So constantly, all the time, we would need to look for additional places [accommodation]. Secondly, obviously, another challenge was money. Because at the end of the day, whatever accommodation we provide, we needed to find money to finance the construction of the camps. At one point, our legislature – they were getting a little bit impatient with the international community about the lack of resources being given to Hong Kong to do that. But we would have to seek funding support from the Legislative Council to provide accommodation for the infrastructure for the Vietnamese refugees. So that was another political challenge that we need to convince the community that this was the right thing and why we needed to do it.

Another point obviously was the location of the camps, which would also be a challenge. Because, in the community, there would be criticisms, or objections from the local residents. And they may say that, they don't want a camp too near to their homes. So it's a very delicate balance that we have to deal with on a daily basis. We had to consult with the local people to assure them not to worry, the Vietnamese refugees are just ordinary people who are seeking refuge here. They are not going to take away your jobs; they're not going to taking away anything. They would need to wait to be determined as to whether or not they are refugees. And secondly, obviously would be the camp management. Discipline and management are very important when you are actually providing camps and accommodation. And again, a very difficult balance you would need to strike. Because on one hand, you would need to recognise that the Vietnamese refugees are not criminals. They are not ordinary criminals. But on the other hand, you need to instil some sort of discipline into a big population, you've got to be able to manage the camps in such a way that it would be run in a very orderly manner. And obviously, in any large population, there would be the criminal elements within a community. And so you would also need to deal with those various issues. Like drug addiction problems, drug trafficking, prostitution problems. These were also some of the things that existed in the camps.

Another issue was you couldn't deprive them of the right to legal representation. So if they wanted to see a lawyer, you should always be able to allow them to do that within a reasonable confine of – what we call – they've got to be able to have the freedom to talk to their lawyers without being heard. And also the screening process was also a very difficult challenge. Because at one point in time when all the Vietnamese refugees were coming to our shores, they were automatically regarded as refugees, and were being resettled by Western countries almost immediately without any fuss. But gradually, as time went on, I think the cold facts were that Western countries were slowing down the resettlement rate. Because they felt that a lot of them weren't refugees. Particularly when they found out that a lot of them were Northern Vietnamese.

And one time, a lot of people were stuck in Hong Kong. The resettlement rate was getting very slow. So we had to introduce what was called a screening system [in order to be] able to screen out those who were not eligible for refugee status. And so we needed to introduce a screening system for these people. And there were obviously a lot of legal issues around the screening process, whether or not we had done it right. So how could we actually talk to the people? If you communicate through a different media, you may not get the story right. You may not be able to pick up the true facts, because you don't speak the language. So at one point in time, we had to use a lot of translators and interpreters.

### **I: Do you know why there were conflicts between the South and North Vietnamese?**

EC: I think mainly because, the Southern Vietnamese were always regarded as a people being oppressed. And they saw the Northern Vietnamese people as the oppressors. So it's the oppressed against the oppressors. So if we mixed them together, they would fight. For quite some time, we found out that a lot of the Northern Vietnamese were fleeing the country mainly because of economic reasons. Mainly because of the typhoon season that wiped out all their crops.

The economic conditions were really bad in Vietnam. So if they couldn't earn a living, if they couldn't find a living that they could still sustain, then obviously they would need to go somewhere else to find a much better place where they could look for employment etc. So, in those times we introduced the screening policy. In introducing the screening policy, we were also mindful of the need to provide a Review Board. So that anyone who got screened out as a non-refugee, they could appeal against the decision of the Screening Officer.

### **I: Who involved the Independent Board?**

EC: The Chairman of the Independent Board was the Justice Francis Blackwell. I couldn't remember if he was a Magistrate or District Court Judge. And the Board members would appoint members of the community – civil servants, not Officers. They were just ordinary folks. So we appointed them to sit on the Board so they would be able to look from an independent point of view. They were not Government and weren't paid by us. And to see whether [or not] the screening process was fair. Whether the Screening Officer at one point in time had overlooked certain important facts, or dismissed certain claims.

So we had a UNHCR representative sitting on the Board as well. And also we introduced in the whole screening process, at any one point in time, if the UNHCR considers a certain person [man or woman] was a refugee, no questions asked, he could exercise what we call a mandate. So the UNHCR could always exercise a mandate, to say that 'don't worry, he is a refugee'. And immediately, we wouldn't ask any questions. We would accept him [or her] as a refugee and we would present this refugee to the US, to European and other resettlement countries for resettlement.

**I: Was the jobs of the Independent Board involve doing the interview or to review the screened-out cases when they appealed?**

EC: Only the screened out cases. The asylum seekers were first interviewed by the Screening Officers. The Screening Officers were mainly Immigration Department Officers. A lot of them received training and we sent them to Vietnam. Some of them – not all – we gave them sufficient training on how to actually recognise a refugee. So they were all trained in a way. So the Board would actually look at the screening process to see the documentation, to see what facts were given, what facts were considered, what facts were not considered to see if there were any omissions along the way.

**I: You mentioned the Officers were trained in Vietnam. By whom were they trained?**

EC: They were not actually trained in Vietnam. We engaged the Vietnamese community, you know, to tell them about things in Vietnam so that they know. Otherwise if you have never been to Vietnam, how would you know about this and that. I only know from what you call a 'macro-background'. But the more detailed part is something that I don't actually know. I do know that all the Screening Officers were given sufficient training to go through the screening process. Otherwise there would be a lot of legal challenges. Because the lawyers when presenting at Court would state that your screening process is flawed, because your Officers aren't sufficiently aware of the situation in Vietnam. So this is something that I know they receive training.

**I: So what were some of the incidents that stood out for you when you were searching for accommodation?**

EC: There were so many. First of all, I'm not sure if you are aware of the procedures. When the boats arrived, most of them were leaky boats. The boats arrived and we had to put them in quarantine at Green Island. It's a very rough structure, just huts there. So when they arrived, they all had to stay in huts for a few days. Just to make sure that they don't come with diseases and things like that. Most of the problems would be with the lice they carry, because they would be on the boats for a long period of time. Then we had to get their names, see where they come from. And then from there, we had to arrange where they should go. Whether they should go to High Island detention centre, whether they could go to Shek Kong, Tai A Chau or Whitehead or places like that.. What stood out for me as important were the fires in Shek Kong. That was a big tragedy. It's difficult for me to say, but fortunately for me, I was on Leave on the day that happened.

**I: When was that?**

EC: I can't remember the exact date, maybe 1993. Shek Kong is an airstrip used by the old British army as what we call a disused runway, somewhere in the new territories. And on that runway, we built tents. The British army provided tents to build all along the runway, the tents to accommodate them. So at one point, the Southerners would be separated from the Northerners. Although they don't mix, they still mixed. One night, what happened was – if I remember correctly – it was on New Year's Eve.

EC: The Southerners went to the Northerners section, they enclosed and blockaded the hut, and then they set fire to the hut. That was a terrible tragedy a lot of people died. On that day it happened, actually I went to the UK for my holidays. I read the news, when I was on the aircraft. It was a very dramatic tragedy that we never forget. We actually had a public enquiry, to look into the causes of the Shek Kong fire. Why did it happen? What happened? What did the Commander do to deal with the fire? Why was the fire allowed to spread? Why was the fire not put

out immediately? Those sorts of questions [were asked]. If I remember correctly, a retired Judge or a serving Judge – Justice Kempster – headed the public enquiry to look into the management of the camp. [Such as], why were the people not divided and separated, and how did it happen. What were the lessons learned, how we may actually prevent similar tragedies from happening again – that sort of thing.

**I: Who would start the public enquiry, the public or the government?**

EC: The Government.

**I: What does a public enquiry mean?**

EC: A public enquiry is a very serious and significant tool used by the Government to determine or find out what happened through an incident. We very rarely establish a public enquiry, unless it's a big thing, such as a big riot, or something like that.

**I: Did you handle any of the riots?**

EC: Actually in my time, the riots were not so serious. After I left the Security Branch it got worse. So I remembered there was one in Whitehead. Just when I was about to leave the Branch, they had a pretty bad riot in Whitehead. A lot of tear gas canisters were used. And so that was a big thing too. But I didn't actually handle the riot myself – my boss did. My boss might have a lot of recollections on that. Also if you have a chance, do talk to my boss – Clinton Leeks and Brian Bresnihan. They were the two refugee coordinators then. Clinton is now in the UK, I think he's in London. And Brian is in Ireland. And I remembered also going to the camps quite often at night. [We were] going to Whitehead, going to Tai A Chau, going to all these places to talk to the Vietnamese refugees to come out on the voluntary repatriation program.

Before the mandatory returnees [program] we had the voluntary returnees [program]. It was run by the UNHCR. And each returnee would be given sufficient money to go back to establish a business. I couldn't remember how much money they got. I think it was \$50USD per person. If you have a family of six, you would get a few hundred USD. And in those days, that would be quite a substantial sum of money in Vietnam. You would be able to start a business and do well. So at one point, I remember going to the camps to talk to groups of people about the voluntary program. Why they needed to consider that, because they wouldn't have any chance of being resettled in the US. So their future lay in Vietnam itself, and the sooner they could get back there, the better for them.

Because they would be able to lead a normal life and I needed to convince them that it was a waste of time to live in a detention camp for their whole lives. I mean, imagine their kids being born in the detention centre and their kids wouldn't be able to see a bus! They wouldn't know what was going on outside the detention centre. So a better place for them to grow up would be back in their own country. And if they are not actually being persecuted, if there were no grounds for persecution then they would have no fear of being returned. So I spent quite a bit of time talking to different groups of people trying to convince them of the voluntary repatriation program. But obviously the voluntary repatriation program was not a success.

**I: You said you went there in the evenings and at night time. Why was that?**

EC: Mostly at night time, because everybody would be there you see. In the day time, they would all go to different places. Some of them would be working in the camps.

**I: But they couldn't leave the camps anyway?**

EC: That's right, they couldn't leave the camps anyway. So they would have to be there. And also, I would be able to leave my desk you see. I would be able to go out and visit the different camps. Because during the day time, it was very busy there. And even if you go away to the washroom, there would be about six or seven people trying to ring you up. They would want to interview you. Sometimes the Morning Post would want to interview you, asking [things like] 'why would you not allow this person to go in, but not this other person?' All these [sorts of] things [had to be dealt with]. But we needed to be worried about people trying to stir up trouble. We needed to be worried about people giving false hope to the Vietnamese refugees. So we needed to be able to somehow exercise restraint on what people could be allowed in. And so there was also another case, a very difficult case I came across. A Vietnamese migrant got married to a – what we call an 'Easy VII'. And that's also troublesome [for us].

When you repatriate them, you have to separate the husband and wife. The wife would have to go back to China,

because Vietnam wouldn't accept her. Then the husband would have to go back to Vietnam because China wouldn't accept him. So it was a 'split-family' case, and it was a very difficult humanitarian problem. A very difficult issue when you have to stand up and defend why you are splitting up a family. And they would say, 'would they be ever able to be able to meet again?' And we would recommend they try the normal channels to be reunited. They should apply to the relevant authorities to seek re-unification. [The Authorities that were] either in China or in Vietnam. But otherwise, there's not much that we can do for these people who were screened out as non-refugees.

**I: Were they kept in the same camp? Was that how they met?**

EC: My memory is fading now. Maybe they met in different camps, and then they got married. They could still get married to [other] people outside the camps, because they were allowed to visit [others]. They were allowed visitors. You never know whether they met inside the camp or elsewhere. It's very difficult to determine.

**I: Was it dangerous for you to enter the camps?**

EC: No, I never had that feeling of being protected or needing protection. I never had that feeling, although you would see in the newspapers, weapons were being made. [This was confirmed] because the police were making routine inspections of the camps. And [the weapons] were unearthed. A lot of spears and knives and things like that. And sometimes, obviously, every time when I visited the camps, the camp superintendent would show me what he had found. Knives, axes and things like that. And sometimes, mainly because people had nothing to do during the day, they were not allowed to work. They had nothing to do, so they channel their energy out into doing something else. So making weapons happened to be a convenient way for them to spend their leisure time. And you'd be amazed at the things they used as weapons. I mean, we had a lot of NGO's wanting to provide different types or instruments or equipment for the people there. And they converted it into something else.

I'll give you an example. Skipping ropes – all the NGO's would let them have the ropes for the kids to play with – but they [the skipping rope handles] used for recreational purposes had metal inserted inside the wooden handle and used as a lever to climb over the fence to escape from the detention centre. The beds, for example, would have the bottom bed taken out. The bed would have a few wooden planks as a support. So the refugees would take out the less important ones, leaving the main frame so they wouldn't collapse when they slept on top of the mattress, so they took out the minor ones. And tried to use [the wooden planks] as a stake. And also, we provided them with electric fences, because in summertime, it was very hot and humid.

All the camps were provided with fans. And they took out the 'shield', and they took out all the metal parts of the fan rims. And [they] tried to make arrows and spears using them as knives. So it was very amazing, they channelled all their creativity into making weapons by the things that were given to them. And this was another problem we encountered. I understood that after I left, because of the repatriation program that was escalating, the unrest in the camps gained momentum as time went on. So as we were approaching 1997, I think the unrest in the camps got more serious. I wasn't there during '94-96, which was when the major disturbances and riots occurred.

**I: When you went into the camps, would you go in with interpreters?**

EC: Yes. I went in there with the interpreters, so we would talk to groups of people with the interpreters there. Also, I worked with the NGO's as well. And so that was the early part of my job. The second part was the repatriation program that I was partly in charge [of]. That was also a very difficult task, because we were people putting people onto aircraft that they didn't want to get onto. And so, it was a very different side to the story then. But luckily, for my part, I've been to Vietnam myself. I've been on a number of flights taking people back [to Vietnam]. Fortunately for myself, there wasn't much resistance. The first mandatory return was about two years before me and it was a terrible experience. They did it in the middle of the night. All the police in riot gear. They went in there [to the detention centres] as if it was a major gun battle. So the police had on their riot gear. They were in the middle of the night, they woke up everybody else and took everyone by force and took them in their trucks and loaded them in their aircraft. The next day, we had really bad press. The international community was up in arms.

We stopped that after the first time for a few years. Until such a time when we actually managed to convince the international community, that there really was no other alternative. Unless [the international community] were willing to take them on. If they [the international community] were not willing to take them on as refugees, we would need to send them back. Because of course, America was the major stumbling block. They didn't want that. They didn't want the refugees either. So from my point of view, that was very unfair for the US Government to oppose or object to what we did. But at the same time, they didn't want to take on the refugees as they regarded them as non-refugees. But [at the same time], they didn't want us to send them back. So that was a very difficult decision that we faced internationally. And there were a lot of obstacles in our way. I think mainly, at the end of the day, it was the

'MIA' (Missing in Action) list that was very concerning [to the US]. [That was] the military personnel that were missing in Vietnam. I think they [the US] were trying to get their people back, but the Vietnamese Government wasn't very helpful or cooperative on those fronts. I think at the end of the day, maybe because the Vietnamese Government was a bit more forthcoming with the MIA list. And so the Americans were a little bit more willing, then, for us to send people back.

Another thing that actually in our view, led to a lot of people in the latter part of the 1990's, to flee Vietnam, was the economic conditions there. They were not good. People just couldn't make a living. And the principal cause for that was the American embargo on Vietnam. Nobody was allowed to trade with Vietnam, and how could a country survive without international trade. So the trade embargo was a very important element in our view, as to why there were so many people leaving the country. A lot of efforts were placed on that, to persuade the US to end the trade embargo. And eventually it ended, and improved the flow of people which receded.

During the first forced repatriation, the airport was in Kai Tak, the old airport, and so we regrouped all the returnees – I can't remember from which camp. We regrouped the refugees and brought them to Kai Tak. And that was very early in the morning, about 4-5am, before the normal flight started. Then we put them in the terminal and were waiting for them to clear and go into the aircraft. At one point, [laughs] trouble started. I'm sure it was well planned, because they knew exactly what to do. And for our part, we were actually stunned and taken by surprise. One lady stripped off all her clothes in front of everyone, a lot of women suddenly took their clothes off. And all our policemen didn't know what to do because they didn't have any blankets. So they tried to find tablecloths and whatever material they could find to wrap around the ladies to try and stop them from stripping their clothes. So that was one episode on the first flight and the trouble [ensuing] when all the women stripped off their clothes. But I think we managed to get them to put their clothes back on and get back onto the flight and they [continued] without incident. And then they went to Vietnam. So that was the first flight. And so for all later flights, we actually equipped ourselves with blankets, just in case they did it again. We had a lot of blankets ready, anytime anyone wanted to strip themselves, we would use a blanket to cover them.

The second flight, I was involved with the Hei Ling Chau people. I had to get up at about 2am to get to Hei Ling Chau, which was an outlying island. I went there very early with the police and CSD people and the whole team went there. The night before, the camp management would separate these people and tell them, 'look, you have been selected to return. So you need to pack up your belongings, you need to go to a separate camp, a separate hut and stay there'. I think most of the time, it went well. There wasn't any trouble. No resistance. So they all packed their bags and stayed in different dormitories. And in the morning, we grouped them together, they had breakfast then we took them by ferry to Kai Tak. From there, we took them on the aircraft. And then, there would be hundreds of reporters. Hundreds, maybe 300 reporters, [were] lining up along the runway to witness the returnees' process. Because after the first 'bad' one, we promised the international press that what we would do would be transparent.

We wouldn't hide anything and we wouldn't use any unnecessary force. We would only use force when it was necessary. We would allow the media to come and cover the event, to see how the repatriation process was being carried out. So in the morning, after grouping the returnees together, we went through the security screening and took them onto the aircraft, one by one. And then we engaged what we called a Hercules aircraft. The first time I had ever been onto a Hercules aircraft. It was one where, in the old days, they would carry the military supplies. You don't get into the aircraft sideways – you get in at the back near the tail. And so we all went up the tail [of the aircraft]. All the seats were actually sideways. It was a very interesting experience, flying in a Hercules. [It was] very noisy. And we were together with the returnees, the camp management people, and also some counsellors. We needed counsellors to counsel some of the returnees who maybe emotional or cry a little bit. And we also had the Immigration people on board. Most of the time, on the flights I went on, there wasn't too much trouble. At first, one or two may be reluctant to [return]. But then, after some counselling, they were willing to walk out on their own onto the aircraft.

Occasionally, I think I witnessed one or two returnees being carried onto the aircraft. One or two struggling returnees needed to be carried. We used the word, 'helped'. We helped them along the way onto the aircraft. And that was how it was being done. Once the aircraft landed in Hanoi, I think most of them were quite resigned to the fact that their future lay back in their home. And so most of the time, they actually went down from the aircraft on their own. We didn't need to carry them. Because one very important thing the Vietnamese Government insisted was that we should not use force. We shouldn't be seen to be carrying them from the aircraft onto the tarmac. They must be seen to be walking out on their own, without being forced or pushed onto their own vehicles. If force was used, the Government wouldn't accept them. You would have to take them back. There would be a big bus, waiting for them to get on board. So they could be sent to a 'clearing centre'. At the clearing centre they would try to sort out which village they were from, to determine where to send them back to. They would need to spend a few days in these transit centres.

So it was a very challenging and very interesting time that I had to deal with.

**I: Is there anything else [you want to add]?**

EC: If I remember correctly, after I had left, the repatriation process was more difficult. Every time, the night before the repatriation we had to separate them. Because there would be a list, and you would have to tell them to pack their belongings for the move (from one hut to another).

**I: How much notice did you give them?**

EC: Not a lot of time. Because you don't want [to give them] time to plan a resistance [against the repatriation]. So you just give them sufficient notice to pack their belongings then move to a different place where they would be grouped together.

**I: Would you say a few hours [notice]?**

EC: I can't remember now. I think the night before, maybe after dinner, they would tell them, 'look you will be going home so please go and pack your bags. And having packed your bags, you will need to move to a different hut and stay there for the night'.

**I: And was it all kept silent in the camps?**

EC: I think so. Otherwise if you give them too long a notice, they would be able to plan [a way out]. Most of the troubles occurred the night before [repatriation]. They would barricade themselves in their rooms and they wouldn't want to leave the hut. Then the rest of the population then galvanised all the support and then said, 'don't go. Because resistance was later more fortified and more intensified, we had to appoint Justices of Peace (JP's) to go into the camps to monitor the repatriation process to make sure no unnecessary force was used or mistreated. Because once there was resistance, force would be used. Once force was used, we would be answerable to the international community.

Our commitment was that no unnecessary force be used. But in the case of a big riot... you would need to stand up and defend your position and defend to the world, this is how we did it. We didn't use unnecessary force, we only used force when we needed to and our actions were monitored by independent people from the community, to oversee the operation. So we engaged JP's. They had to move into some – I'm not sure whether it was the night before [repatriation]. But definitely on the day of departure, they would be there as early as 3-4am. They would then monitor the whole process. They obviously wouldn't go to Vietnam; their monitoring would stop at the aircraft. Then they would need to compile a report to the Governor, to say that they were there and whether there was any trouble. And if there was trouble, why was there trouble, how was it handled, was it handled reasonably well or not? Was unnecessary force used? If so, why [was it used]?

**I: So the returnees were given notice the night before to gather their belongings, then they would be transferred to another camp?**

EC: Not another camp, a dormitory within that camp. We won't try different people from different camps. We would only focus on one, i.e. Whitehead Section 2. We would gather those people and move them to a different section within that camp. So they would be able to stay in there. Otherwise we wouldn't be able to manage [the situation].

**I: What happened next? Can you explain to me the procedure?**

EC: And after they were grouped together in separate huts or dormitories, the next day, we would then ask them to leave. We would get them out the camp to go on a ferry. And we would take them to the airport.

**I: Were they taken by a bus from the camp to the ferry?**

EC: From the camp, they would be taken by bus to the ferry. And from the ferry, all the way to Kai Tak. And from Kai Tak, then they would be taken to a sort of hangar. Then they would go through the security process, to ensure that they had no weapons on them. And having done that, then they would go directly from the tarmac to the aircraft. And there would be lines of reporters watching the repatriation process.

**I: From the time they left the detention centre to the time they get onto the aircraft, approximately how many hours?**

EC: Actually, we would be there by about 4am at the latest. 3-4am. At 4am, we would reach Hei Ling Chau. So at about half past 4, if they would leave the place then whole process would end by about 7.30am.

**I: That's not that long.**

EC: Because the aircraft needs to get away before the first flight leaves or arrives [at the airport]. Otherwise the runway would be [blocked]. So they can't afford for the repatriation process to take such a long time.

EC: And then when we arrived in Vietnam, we would need to have a meeting with the Reception party. And we would hand over all the papers, the people and lists to them. And then they would ask us whether force was used. Any restraints were being used. And they would see the returnees, take them to the bus and then they would go and we would go.

EC: And so, that was how mainly my job was planning the repatriation process, booking the aircraft, getting everything done, getting people on board, making sure no unnecessary force was used etc.

**I: What airlines or what aircraft was used then?**

EC: We used C1-3. A Hercules aircraft. I couldn't remember which airline we used. It wasn't Cathay. It was a Far East Air Company (FEAC). Someone called John Murphy, would know. John Murphy was with FEAC.

**I: And do you remember how much?**

EC: I can't remember now.

**I: I think Peter Choy mentioned that something like \$1.5 million HKD per flight.**

EC: Something like that.

**I: And the crew were all provided by the FEAC?**

EC: Yes.

**I: And somebody mentioned to me that Cathay was used, so that must be the later days.**

EC: Maybe. Because at one time, again I was lucky in a way – in one of the subsequent flights after I left the Security Branch, it went down the harbour. The aircraft came back from Hanoi without problems and took off from Kai Tak. But as it took off, it crashed and went into the sea.

**I: Did anybody die?**

EC: I think the pilots perished. Because of that, they may have later on engaged Cathay. But Cathay was actually engaged with voluntary flights. The voluntary flights used Cathay and Vietnam Airlines.

**I: But the involuntary, forced ones were the ones you handled?**

EC: That's right.

**I: And how often did you organise those flights? Once every few months?**

EC: Once every two months, or once every month. I can't quite remember now.

**I: And about how many returnees from each flight approximately?**

EC: Approximately about 30-40. Not too many people. The number of people that we could return to Vietnam would depend on whether they were accepted by the Vietnamese Government [or not]. So we sent them a list on a regular basis. And they would come back to us saying who the ones they could accept were. So the number of people who got sent back would depend on the clearance of the Vietnamese Government. So I think later on, the Vietnamese Government sent to Hong Kong a delegation to clear the number of returnees going back to Vietnam in order to



speed up the process. SO I think later on, they would have the ORP once every month. But I can't remember that now. At first, the numbers weren't that great because the clearance was very slow. We would have to chase them, and the names. So the numbers actually at a later date began to increase.

**I: So let's say you would send the list to Hanoi, how long would it take for them to get back to you?**

EC: It took them quite a while to come back to us.

**I: Maybe months, weeks?**

EC: Weeks and months I think. If I remember, the delegation actually came to interview the people, to make sure they got the names correct. Sometimes the names may not be right.

We routed through the British Embassy. And then the British Embassy would take the case to the Government and then it came back to us. I can't remember exactly how long that took us. But at first, I think it took them quite a while to clear the lists.

**I: Anything else that sticks in your mind?**

EC: The only other impression I got was Tai A Chau camp. Tai A Chau was a very special camp that was specifically for the Southerners. The camp itself was a very leisurely camp, because it was far away from everything else. The people there were a lot more free than those in Whitehead or High Island or the others. They were able to swim in the sea, as the camp was more remote and less secured in a way. Although there was perimeter fencing, a lot of the people were able to have a swim whenever they wanted to. Because there was nothing there and it was miles away. That was the impression I got from visiting Tai A Chau. Whitehead was a lot more fortified. They had perimeter fencing [everywhere]. But a Vietnamese refugee would be able to climb a 30 foot fence within seconds. So you wouldn't be able to catch them if they got out. So they needed two fences – an inner and outer fence. And in between there was a track. And the track was for bicycles. So if they couldn't catch an escapee from the inner fence, they would still be able to catch them from the outer fence by using a bicycle. I was told they could get over a 30 foot fence within 5-30 seconds and then they were gone.

## Second Interview

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**I: I wanted to ask you, what did the whole experience [of working with the Vietnamese refugees] mean to you? Those three years of your job?**

EC: Oh, it was tremendous. I think my job as an Administrative Officer; this was the hardest job I have ever come across. The pressure is so high and so big. You don't want to leave your desk. Because once you leave your desk, there would be too many telephone calls for you to answer. [There would be] interviews from Newsweek, international problems etc. If it wasn't the media, it was the lawyers. And if it wasn't the lawyers, it would be the NGO's. And if it wasn't the NGO's, it would be the camp management. They would want to seek a directive. It was pressure all the time. So you cannot afford to make mistakes, because otherwise it would appear in the news the next day, and it would make an international incident. So, for me, it was a very valuable experience of dealing with people, dealing with aspirations, dealing with expectations and also dealing with reality.

But it also allowed me to somehow have a feel of the American hypocrisy that, at that time, I really disliked. They disliked everything that we did. When they were trying to repatriate their illegal immigrants from Mexico, they didn't even bother to tell the press! But what we did in Hong Kong, we involved everybody else. We tried to tell them we had nothing to hide; we tried to do it as humanely as possible and without any unnecessary force. And so, for me, it was a valuable experience in the international arena. And I got to see Vietnam! Basically, I went there a couple of times. At one time, I went with the Refugee Status Review Board, because the Review Board needed to look at Vietnam too. They needed to visit Vietnam and talk to the Authorities there to somehow acquaint themselves with the Vietnamese situation. So I went there with the Refugee Status Review Board, and I also went there on another occasion, just to speak with the Officials there. And one thing I didn't tell you earlier was that we had to separate the Southerners and Northerners later on. Within the Northern provinces, we had to separate the [different groups]. If they were from Hai Phong and Quang Ninh, they had to stay on different sides. It was a very interesting time.

**I: Did you know why they didn't like each other? Could it be gangsters?**

EC: I don't know. It happens all the time. I think it's a different culture. Even the Chinese, if you are from Southern China, our eating habits, our language is slightly different from Northern China. If you are from a province... we don't really quite get on with the others from different provinces. They are very strange to us. It is the same thing, I suppose. Maybe, it's more like America – the Hispanics don't get on too well with the African Americans and the Asian Americans? Even within the same country, because the country is so big, you have different provinces. And each province would have its own particular way of living. And when you group them together, there are bound to be conflicts. I think this is something new to us. We had to separate them otherwise they would fight. Later on, the camps were divided [into the different provinces]. [It was] very interesting.

**I: So when people mentioned the words 'Vietnamese refugees' what comes to your mind?**

EC: Actually, have you ever read the book written by a refugee called, 'Heaven and Earth'? I read that book, when I was doing the work with the refugees, and was very impressed by the way the author described Vietnam as it was then. 'Heaven and Earth' – it was made into a movie? So when you ask me about the impression I got of Vietnam, the first impression I got was from that book, [as] that book made a very strong impression on me. But otherwise, the impression I had was inevitably Hanoi, because I had never been to Saigon.

At a time when I went to Hanoi, it was still very backward then. As the aircraft went down, I saw a lot of fish ponds. And I was told, they were not fish ponds but bombed craters because of the American bombings which were so intensive in the Hanoi area. All the bomb craters were filled by water. So people would use them as a pond for fishing. So that was one impression that I got. But otherwise, I went to Quang Ninh, and it's a very scenic place. [It was] a beautiful place. Its borders are very close to China, the South-West of China. It's a very scenic place, a very rural country. But at the time, of course it was a very austere place. Now I suppose it's getting a lot better.



## Francis Tse Siu Fung



Interviewee: Mr T (T)  
Interviewer: (I)  
9:45am, Wednesday, 9 January 2013, Correctional Services Office, Hong Kong

**I: Mr T, thank you very much for allowing me to interview you this morning. Could you please state your full name and where and when you were born?**

T: My Chinese name is Tse Siu Fung. I was born in Hong Kong. Normally, those people working in the camp called me Francis, including NGO workers, UNHCR staff and Vietnamese's camp people.

**I: What year were you born?**

T: 1959.

**I: When did you start working with the Vietnamese boat people?**

T: June of '88.

**I: What was your role there?**

T: At that time, I was the Welfare Officer. I took care of those Vietnamese migrants, later called Vietnamese boat people in Hong Kong. The location I worked at that time was actually refugee camps.

**I: At that time, the Vietnamese situation was very well-known in the community and there were a lot of problems then. So were you assigned that job or did you ask for it?**

T: No. Actually, it was an internal appointment by [the] Correctional Services Department. Before I was working in the camp, I was also a Welfare Officer in a correctional institution.

**I: How did you feel when you were appointed to that position?**

T: Nothing special. Just like a Correctional Officer in an institution because it was an internal appointment.

**I: Was it like anything you had experienced before?**

T: It's strange, and in fact the whole situation is different to that of penal institutions in the Correctional Services Department. It is more like a social worker.

**I: How many years were you in that position?**

T: I started to work in 1988 inside a Vietnamese boat people centre, until 1997. That means, I spent almost nine years in refugee business.

**I: Do you remember some of the significant incidents that happened during your years?**

T: Yes of course. For that whole period of nine years, there were a lot of things happening in the camps. But some are quite significant to me. We received Mother Theresa in 1988. That was the only time she could visit Vietnamese boat people centre in Hong Kong. It was because at that time, her followers also provided volunteer services in some of the refugee camps. And those Catholic sisters used to come to our camps in the morning and conduct some prayer groups, and also some lessons in English teaching for women, old people and children. That was why we had built up a certain connection with Mother Theresa's followers at that time. And it was wonderful, because they actually are not involved with Vietnamese refugee business.

**I: What were some of your duties on this job?**

T: I was responsible for taking care of the welfare of the Vietnamese refugees in the camp, as well as to communicate with the workers in the camp, including UNHCR workers. My main business was to coordinate all NGO's and UNHCR to provide the best welfare service for those refugees if we can. In particular, I was transferred to Whitehead that was the biggest refugee camp in Hong Kong. At that time, Whitehead accommodated at the most 25,000 Vietnamese' refugees.

**I: What year did you go to Whitehead?**

T: 1990.

**I: Is it true that there were almost 25,000 refugees in that camp?**

T: In the beginning of 1990, I believe there was around 20,000 or less.

**I: When you said that you provided the welfare for the refugees, what does that entail?**

T: My colleagues in other sections would take care of the medical services, security etc. My section main concerns were with family, to take care of the family services. And also some other services like marriage. You know at that time, there were a lot of NGO's working in the camps. For example, International Social Services, Save the Children,

Community Family International services. These are various NGO's providing different categorical services in the camp. So the welfare section was mainly to coordinate with all these NGO's to provide such kinds of services, inside the camp. And also, in Hong Kong, sometimes the Vietnamese boat people would have their own requirements for certain Government services. Including if you have a newborn baby, you would need a birth certificate. Or if you wanted to marry someone outside, or inside the camp, you would have to go to the marriage registry to make an appointment to attend a ceremony, scheduled for the marriage. And eventually, to get a marriage certificate, these are the foundational business that a Welfare Officer [is responsible for]. At that time, I was the Principal Welfare Officer, in charge of all these kinds of services.

**I: Was the birth rate high amongst the refugees?**

T: I can't say it was very high. As far as I can remember, the birth rate inside the women's camp is almost the same as the outside community in Hong Kong.

**I: What were some of the complications of your job?**

T: That's a good question. The reason is that because, on the one hand, my Department has to take care, or represent the Government to maintain security and/or discipline inside the camp. On the other hand, those NGO's and also UNHCR tried to strive for the welfare benefits of Vietnamese boat people in the camp. And you can see, for these two different groups, you would definitely have some conflicts. Sometimes, misunderstandings between the two sides. So the welfare situation at that time was to be a type of mediator, or person in between these two parties. To actually coordinate with different sides of people, managing the camp, or providing services to the camp, in order to try and strike a balance.

**I: Was your job at any time dangerous?**

T: I have to say that the Vietnamese people would respect the welfare staff. Maybe they understood the welfare centre staff, were the people who were helping them in the camps. And they could work through the welfare system to get the services. They would like to have financial [services], or to get certain kinds of things they would like to make inside the camp. And the welfare sessions could be their only official channel they could approach in the camp. So, my section staff would normally respect the Vietnamese, and they have maintained a very good relationship. Or, you could say a very harmonious relationship with those people in the camps. I don't think there were any safety concerns.

**I: Were there situations like riots for repatriation, did you have to get involved with that?**

T: With the repatriation program operated by my Department, my section only took part in a very small area. Say, when some Vietnamese boat people had been screened out and ordered, or given instructions by the Immigration Department to go back to Vietnam, my section worked to try to help to identify people to get as far as possible, those things that they want. For example, some Vietnamese boat people, before they are returned to Vietnam would choose to meet some of their friends and relatives outside. We would arrange interviews or certain kinds of visits for these Vietnamese boat people, before their departure from Hong Kong. This would require some coordination, telephone calls, etc. And we would do that.

Some Vietnamese boat people would choose to get some say new clothing, before their departure, because they would say that when they returned back to Vietnam, they wanted to return looking good. My welfare staff would also try to coordinate with some NGO's and [they would] send some donations from local communities to get some clothing. And get them into the camp and try to give it to those people returning to Vietnam. And these were some of the things we would have to do. And of course, there were a lot of other things we would have to settle for the boat people before their departure.

**I: Were there any particular moments or incidents that stood out for you?**

T: I can remember one very particular case. Of a female unaccompanied minor. That was 1988 when I first started working in the camp. I met one girl, almost at the age of 16-17 when she came to Hong Kong. She actually was a North Vietnamese coming from Hai Phong. Her story is very touching. In fact, it was very sad. She was raised by her mother. Her mother was married to another man in Hai Phong. When she was 16 years old, she was raped by her stepfather. Eventually, she was pregnant. And after her arrival, she approached the welfare section and we referred her case to an NGO called Community Family Services International (CFI). The girl was so sad and I can say that at that time, she suffered from depression.

With the joint effort of CFI workers and together with myself personally, we helped that young girl to overcome the problem. And about 6 months later, after the delivery of the baby, she signed an undertaking to handover her parental rights to the Hong Kong Government. And at the time of the delivery in the hospital, the baby was immediately transferred to a Children's Centre in Hong Kong. And that girl returned to camp and stayed in the camp until her departure to Vietnamese, sometime in 1995. This is as I can remember. So it was one very sad story at that time I encountered. I think it is a certain kind of story that is forgotten by the people in the camp.

**I: So she was screened out, and came back to Williams?**

T: There's another good side to her story. Now, it was that time about the end of 1988. After her delivery of the baby, she returned to camp and stayed in camp and worked in the camp as an assistant with those NGO's. And she learned English and also other things in the camp. And she also got a salary from the NGO. Later, I know that she came across another boy in the camp. A Vietnamese' boy. And they sure enough, fell in love. And probably after 3-4 years, they were engaged. And applied for marriage in Hong Kong. And before her return to Vietnam, she actually was married to that boy. At that time, they were probably 20 or 21. It was a good sign of their story. And they both returned to Vietnam. So this is one case I can remember.

**I: How would you describe your nine years with the Vietnamese boat people situation?**

T: I cannot say it in one single word or sentence. It is very hard to describe. A lot of things were happening in the camp. At the beginning, because there was no screening policy, all those Vietnamese boat people detained in the camps, there were some who had permission to leave the camp and stay in Hong Kong until they migrated to other countries. And some, they could not get permission to leave the camp. And they had to stay in the camp until their departure back to Vietnam. This was probably before 1994. So the camp was quite stable. We were all working there, serving as Social Workers, taking care of those people – or you could say, those underprivileged people – and they are confined in the camps without any access to outside Hong Kong. Within that period, our main duty was to organise a lot of activities with the NGO's. For example, we organised a day camp for the children with 'Save the Children' and others.

To allow the children to go out and participate in activities in the local community, I remember Ocean Park – even some Vietnamese' boat peoples' children – there were a range [or children] accompanied by welfare staff of about 60 to go to Ocean Park and to enjoy some happiness time. And we also worked with other NGO's to provide education, although it was quite basic. But still, we could provide Primary education and Junior Secondary Education in the camp. I can see evidence of thousands of children around the perimeter fence of the camp, waiting to go into the school inside the camp. It was a picture that was very touching in your heart. You could see many young boys and girls. They were very happy, for a time in the morning to wait to go into the school. And on the other hand, we also arranged family reunions. [This was] with those people because, Vietnamese boat people were coming into Hong Kong in different batches. Some of them came earlier than their wife, for example. So, some already stayed in another camp.

There were many cases of application for family reunions at that time. The problem was, they had no identity documents sometimes. It was very difficult to establish their relationships, their actual relationships. So we were just like social workers outside, working with their records and other NGO's to get the information from both sides to try and establish the relationships. And after that, we had to report to the UNHCR, and with their approval, we let those different parties join together. This was one of the businesses we [undertook]. And sometimes we saw families that had been separated for a few years. They hadn't seen each other [in that time]. And once they were approved to have the family reunion, they would be put aside into one single camp. And you can see their joyfulness, their happiness. This was part of what the job was we were doing in most parts of the refugee camps. But when you were talking about repatriation, yes. After 1994, I can't quite remember whether it was '94 or '95, some of my staff in the welfare program was involved in the repatriation program as well.

**I: What was it like?**

T: I can say that, as welfare staff, we only supported and provided some logistical support for the repatriation scheme. We were not directly involved.

**I: What about the riots? Did you experience any of those?**

T: There were a lot of riots, starting in the camp when I was there. There were a lot of riots between different groups. In the beginning in 1988, we had already witnessed, or encountered some riots. You can't say they were major riots. They were some kinds of conflicts, between two groups of Vietnamese' boat people. Sometimes North Vietnamese



against South Vietnamese. Sometimes Hai Phong people against the Quang Ninh people.

Of course, the welfare staff, they would be instructed to try to be the mediator between two groups. To ask these ringleaders of the groups to cease their fighting if possible. But sometimes, it is very difficult to do. And I think the welfare sessions stopped at that time, if the camp situation was interrupted or deteriorated into a riot. Our main duty was to take care of those people that are not actually involved in the fighting. We tried to help these people to stay in their own dormitories. And also provide water and food and also other assistance they would like to have. But for the fighting itself, the violence itself, it was settled by Security staff.

**I: So would the fighting amongst the refugees happen more in closed camps or in open camps?**

T: I don't think open camps had more fighting or riots than closed camps. I think there were more in the closed camps.

**I: Well obviously they stayed in the camp and didn't have much to do. And were frustrated.**

T: I can say that at that time, at the open camp at daytime, when they would go out to work, they would run a camp in the very late evening. They would stay in the hostel in the night-time and evening. And in the morning, say 6-7am, when they would start to leave the camp and work outside, I don't think they would have any time [for fighting and/or riots]. Of course, there were still some single incidents of assault cases or even murder cases. But these were individual cases.

**I: So apart from having conflicts amongst the refugees, what about refugees versus the authorities?**

T: There were two stages of the camp. Before 1994, before the repatriation – the mandatory repatriation taking place – the camp was ok for the management. After the mandatory repatriation taking place, there was violence, some resistance groups against the mandatory repatriation. That is all I can say.

**I: What was one of the biggest riots against the authorities that you can remember?**

T: There was one in Whitehead on 4 May 1995, if my memory is still ok. It happened around 3-4am, because at that time, the mandatory repatriation had already taken place for a couple of months. So inside the camp, there was tension and people resisted going back to Vietnam. There were a lot of male Vietnamese, who got together on that night, the 4 May, in the early morning, 3am, they started to create trouble for the management. And over thousands of male Vietnamese used some tools, some kinds of furniture, big furniture in the camp to break off the perimeter fence of the camp. And started to run out of the camp [by the] hundreds.

It was a very large scale disturbance that night. And they started to set fire to some Government vehicles, and also some staff vehicles. And also some Government offices, surrounding Whitehead detention centre. And I returned to the camp about 4am. I caught the bus and witnessed over hundreds of males holding iron bars, running from one side of the camp to another side of the camp. And all the CSD staff were forced to retreat to outside the main gate. The whole camp lost control, until the morning, say 7 or 8 o'clock, when the police reinforcements and CSD staff came back. And the management started to regain some control of those office areas. But we couldn't go inside the camp.

**I: Were there any casualties during that incident?**

T: It was for over twenty hours, starting from 4 May until the 5 May. There were some casualties. And some staff sustained injuries. And some Vietnamese people sustained injuries as well. And it was the first time the Hong Kong disciplinary force had to use a large number of gas, weapons etc. to subdue the violence inside the camp.

**I: Did anyone die?**

T: No. It was fortunate, nobody died.

**I: What about the women and children in the camp?**

T: They were hiding inside their dormitories. And very few females were coming out to resist. Mostly it was male



Vietnamese coming out to resist the security staff.

**I: If they involved a thousand of them, you would think it would have taken them a while to organise themselves?**

T: The situation was such that, in Whitehead there were ten different sections, or ten different camps. From number one to number ten. Each section contained the same group of Vietnamese, from Vietnam. So, say, section 1 came from Hai Phong. Section 3-4 might come from Quang Ninh. Section 9 might have come from [another province]. Section 10 would come from South Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh City or something like that. So you can say that inside each section, they are all 'nice' [to each other]. Because they are all coming from the same province, the same origin. But I don't think from all ten sections, they would be one single unity [they would be united].

I don't think this situation happened at that time. But they shared the similar concern of being returned to Vietnam by force, they were definitely against the management and Immigration at that time. So they would choose to coordinate inside their own section and against the security staff at that time. Against the kind of organisation [unlikely that they were organised]. Not a single organisation over the whole of Whitehead camp, but different people in different sections.

**I: So with that incident, would you say that people from all the sections came out to fight?**

T: Mostly. The majority would come from Sections 1-8 because they were on one side of the camp. Whitehead was divided into two sides, separated by a small hill. On one side of the hill, there was Sections 1-8. So, this skirmish happened on that night on the [side of] Sections 1-8. And on the other side [of the hill] was Sections 9 and 10.

**I: And from 1-8, were they predominantly North Vietnamese?**

T: A lot of them were.

**I: And 9 and 10 were South Vietnamese?**

T: 10 was South Vietnamese.

**I: But 9 and 10, the South Vietnamese were also there to be repatriated?**

T: They had started to be repatriated. But on that night, they had no direct involvement in the riot. I can say that.

**I: Is there anything else that comes to mind that you can remember, or anything particular you want to say about the whole experience you had with the Vietnamese boat people?**

T: Maybe I could try to talk more about the welfare side. From 1997, '98, I can see a lot of NGO workers working in the camps. They are not Hong Kong local people. They are coming from [other nations]. Some from the US, Australia, Canada or other places around the world. Some are actually English-speaking people. Some are Chinese. Some are Vietnamese people, in fact. They have been settled in other countries, and choose to return to Hong Kong to contribute. Or to provide their efforts. To help all these Vietnamese boat people in the camps. It was wonderful, and you can see what a human being should do. What mankind should do to help the poor people from Vietnam.

These NGO workers would normally [receive] very little in return for their salary. Some of them were professional workers. Some own their own businesses in their own countries. Some of them are religious leaders or people. And these people, all these people have one single goal to contribute their best efforts to help those poor Vietnamese inside the camp. To try to get them to develop their own growth. Or to help, in particular, those children to grow up as normal as possible, compared with others outside the community. So I can see that they always strive for their best. And this group of NGO workers, they should be given credit.

**I: In your career life, before and after the time you spent with the Vietnamese boat people, how would you compare that experience?**

T: It was a very memorable time when I was working in the camp for nine years. It was different to all [my other experiences]. I never imagined I would work in the camps, as my profession is a social worker in my department. To

take care of those young offenders, before they are returned to society. So taking care of Vietnamese boat people in the camp is another side to the story. They are not offenders. They are not people that we need to ... I can see that there are very basic welfare services or needs required to help these people in the camp. And in fact, I got a lot of memorable times in there. I can see many happy faces, in particular, those young children. When they had grown up in the camps, when they are really young – say 4 or 5 – when they return to Vietnam or when they settle in other Western countries, they have grown up to being teenagers already.

**I: Thank you very much for your time and for sharing some of your experiences.**



## Gordon Leung

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Interviewee: Gordon Leung (GL)

Interviewer: (I)

9:15am, Saturday 5 January 2013, Business Centre of the T-Hotel, Hong Kong

**I: Could you please state your full name?**

GL: My full name, in Chinese, is Leung Chong Tai, Gordon.

**I: When and where were you born?**

GL: I was born in Hong Kong, in 1962.

**I: Thank you very much. I'd like to get to understand your experience with the Vietnamese boat people. Could you please start by telling me when and how you got involved with the Vietnamese boat people?**

GL: Actually, I'm a civil servant of the Hong Kong Government. I worked in the Security Branch from the year 1994, from April '94, to about September 1996. I think that was the time I was working there. I was at the time holding the position of Principal Assistant Secretary for Security, working on the subject of the Vietnamese boat people. My boss at the time was Mr Brian Bresnehan, who was the Refugee Coordinator. And we both worked [under] the Secretary for Security, who was initially Mr Alistair Asprey, then later, Mr Peter Lai. So that was my during my period. So that was my official dealing with the Vietnamese boat people.

**I: What were your main duties?**

GL: At that time, the duty of the Security Branch was to have overall policy responsibility for the whole subject. What that means, actually was, in Government structure, a policy branch looks after the policy aspect and oversees the implementation of those policies, which are carried out by implementation agents including Government Departments. For example the Police [Department], the Correctional Services Department, the Immigration Department as well as a host of NGO's [that are] in support. Including for example, Caritas, YMCA etc. And of course, with the International Community – the UNHCR in particular – which has an office in Hong Kong. And of course, working in close collaboration with, at that time, with the FCO – Foreign Commonwealth Office – at that time. Because the subject itself was not totally Hong Kong, but also had an international dimension.

**I: Did your duties change in that role, or were they the same as before?**

GL: Being an Administrative Officer in the Hong Kong Government, we changed jobs every two or three years. So, as I mentioned, I worked from '94-'96 in the Security Branch, and before and afterwards I was moved to different positions.

**I: How different was your position in this one compared to the others?**

GL: Very different. This was, I would say, the first position that was not actually purely policymaking. In the sense of writing papers and analysing subjects. Whereas in the Security Branch, it was more of policy-making as well as some sort of implementation being done in the Security Branch. The reason I say that is in my previous job, before coming to the Security Branch, I was dealing with – say, the shipping matter. Then we had the Marine Department doing all the implementation and daily operations. Whereas in the Economic Services Branch – as it was known at that time –

we dealt mainly with 'paper', and policy analysis and policymaking. Whereas in the Security Branch, in our Division at that time, we actually had quite a few Immigration Officers working in the Branch as well. Because a lot of actions, not only took place at the Departmental level, but also at a Branch level. We had to monitor the arrivals every day. And in terms of the repatriation, the Branch took some action ourselves. Because, apart from actions occurring 'on the ground', we did a lot of actual coordination work at the Branch level. So, for example, the organisation for the involuntary repatriation flights was done in the Branch. Not only in the Immigration Department.

**I: When you first started, what was it like? Did you get involved in a particular project or assignment?**

GL: When I first arrived, I was actually quite astonished by the wide range of issues. Because under the title of 'Vietnamese boat people', I thought it was like any other policy coordination work. But it was much more than that, and much more complex than that. There were so many aspects that I hadn't really touched on before. When I first arrived, the first assignment I was given was the follow-up on an enquiry by, I think, three Justice of Peace (JP's), into the riots that took place in Section 8 of Whitehead [detention camp]. Which took place, I think in 1994, or the end of 1993 – I can't quite remember the dates. The background to that was, because the Government at that time had to implement the involuntary repatriation of 'so-called' screened outs. Meaning those who had gone through the screening process and were determined to be non-refugees. So they had to be sent back to Vietnam, as simple as that. And at that time, there were two channels for them to do so. First was the voluntary channel, which was run by the UNHCR, meaning that they voluntarily go onto the plane and go back to Vietnam with some sort of subsidy provided by the UNHCR. But at that time, not too many people chose that route. So there was another route, which was the involuntary repatriation.

This means, the Hong Kong Government at that time would send people back against their wishes, if you put it [bluntly]. And that meant, the Hong Kong Police and Immigration had to pick up a certain number of people, send them back and then that was the so-called repatriation. And the operation itself was pretty complicated. And you can imagine, you had to go into the detention centres, and then bring them out. The returnees would be brought out. And sometimes, you can imagine there would be clashes or conflicts. People would not like to go, because, it was involuntary. And there were reports that sometimes, force had to be used. And actually, when I arrived in the Security Branch, the background to Section 8 was that there were riots, because there was a so-called, what we called 'ORP' – Orderly Repatriation Program Operation – at that time. And it was strongly resisted by the detainees. That is, the Section 8 detainees at that time. And the police at that time had to use tear gas to put out the riots. And that became a major incident, and I think the Governor at that time was Chris Patten. He [the Governor] ordered an enquiry into the whole incident, to make sure there was no wrong-doing, as well as to look into ways to improve future operations.

So when I first arrived in the Security Branch that was the background. And the JP's had more or less finished their reports. And then there were some recommendations made. In the Security Branch, we had to take those recommendations forward. One which I think I personally dealt with was, how to ensure that although we had to continue implementing the ORP, how we ensured that it was done in the most humane manner to minimise the risk of causing harm to these returnees. And one of the recommendations at that time was that we should invite NGO's to observe the process. And that was quite difficult, because the NGO's – some of them -were reluctant to take part in that, because they felt that this was a Government action and why should they take part in that. And maybe seen by the detainees as siding with the Government. Which would make their daily services in the detention centres difficult. Because, psychologically, the detainees might not believe in the NGO staff anymore, if they were seen to be the 'friend' or spy of the Government.

So there were a lot of misgivings and suspicions, so eventually we managed to persuade a few NGO's to help us play this role. Because honestly, we never meant to harm anyone. We just needed to make sure the [operation] was done in the most proper way possible. And eventually we managed to do that. And of course, internally, we had to persuade the implementation departments, for example the Police and the Correctional Services people to accept that arrangement as well. Because to them, they were also being very sceptical, if they are being 'watched over their shoulder' during their operations, they felt very uneasy as well even for the smallest thing. But eventually that was done, and I think that helped to create the transparency of the whole thing. And the NGO's, eventually their comments were also fair. That the Hong Kong operational departments tried to do their job with the minimal force required. And tried their very best to respect the human rights of the detainees during the operation. Although we know that the whole operation to them was a difficult one.

**I: You mentioned the camp [Whitehead] was burned down?**

GL: That was before my arrival in the Security Branch. I remember it was burned down, not sure whether it was

totally burned down at that time, or it may have been partly, or so badly damaged that eventually the Government had to tear the whole thing down. I remember when I joined the Security Branch, it was all flat there. And so probably, if I remember correctly, it was quite seriously damaged during the riots. And eventually, the Government had to tear the whole thing down.

**I: Was the fire an intentional incident?**

GL: I think it arose from the conflicts. Maybe it was part of the resistance, put up by the detainees at that time.

**I: So they didn't set out to set fire to the buildings, but it just happened during the rioting?**

GL: That's my understanding from my recollections.

**I: Was there any casualties from those riots?**

GL: Can't remember now. I think there were. Not to the extent... I don't think so. But obviously there were casualties in terms of injuries.

**I: You mentioned Section 8. Was that the name or did it have any specific meaning?**

GL: For the details, you may have to ask the Correctional Services Department. My recollection was that during that time, actually I think throughout the whole history of Hong Kong receiving Vietnamese boat people, it depends on the origin of the people coming. Roughly, we divided them into Northerners and Southerners. Because from our experience, they were quite different people. And sometimes they had conflicts amongst themselves. For example, Northerners versus Southerners; because of the historical happenings in Vietnam. So I think the Correctional Services people, when they managed the detention centres, they were very cautious that Southerners be put into one section and Northerners into another section.

And within a camp, usually they divided them into sections so that it was more manageable. Otherwise if you had a whole camp under one section with thousands of people, obviously it will be difficult to manage. So usually within a camp, they would divide them into different sections. And within the sections, they might have a mix of Southerners from different villages or provinces, but they would definitely try to avoid putting Northerners and Southerners together. Actually, I think in the late 1970's, or in the '80's, there had been one incident that happened in Sai Kung in Hong Kong. Where the Northerners and Southerners fought amongst themselves. And that caused one or two deaths. And that was a very bitter experience for the Hong Kong Government as well, so since then, we were very cautious in maintaining different sections. But within one section, usually it was because of the size that we wanted to maintain within a certain section there wouldn't be too many [refugees]. Which could make the management [of the camp] very difficult.

**I: During your time, after the incident at Whitehead, were there any more riots that you know of or were involved?**

GL: Oh yes. Actually, I think the Section 8 incident at Whitehead was the first big-scale resistance to the ORP. And since then, the ORP slowed down quite a bit. Obviously, because there was the Report that needed to be compiled, and secondly, during that time, since the report was being compiled, the ORP slowed down to almost a halt. Because everyone wanted to wait and see what would happen after that. And then, the Government at the time had great difficulty in persuading the so-called screened out people to go back to Vietnam. Because you don't have a 'stick', you only have a 'carrot' offered by the UNHCR. And even so, the 'carrot' begins to lose its magic, because people felt that if the Hong Kong Government was unable to implement the ORP, that means that if a Vietnamese person came to Hong Kong, underwent the screening but eventually couldn't be repatriated, then at least he or she would have a chance to stay in Hong Kong forever. And that may be something in their mind that [this] would be better than staying in Vietnam.

So that was a great pressure on the Hong Kong Government, to try to restart the ORP after the Section 8 incident. And the JP Report gave us the recommendations, and that was why at that time, we had to make sure the recommendations were carried out so the ORP could be restarted. And that took place, I think, about roughly 1 year after my arrival in the Security Branch, when we had everything in place in carrying out the JP's report's recommendations, as well as re-establishing the relationship with Vietnamese authorities. And then we went back to the ORP, and then riots continued to be mounted by the detainees. I remember every time we had to go to the camp, or the detention centres, for ORP, it was like a military operation.

Sadly, it was a very tense operation because a lot of the Vietnamese screen-outs harboured hopes that somehow, some time, [someone] would come to their rescue. Or that they would like to hang out as long as possible to wait for something – I don't know what they were waiting for. Sometimes the Correctional Services colleagues told us, that in their context with the Vietnamese screen-outs, [they would ask] 'what are you actually waiting for?' And they would reply, 'I don't know. I just want to wait'. So that is the mentality at that time. But that is something that the Hong Kong community cannot sustain without any limits. So we had to carry out the ORP, and every time it was like a war zone. Especially when it was at the start of the revival of the operations. The first few times, if I remember correctly, was pretty tense. [It was] pretty difficult as well.

**I: Could you describe one of them?**

GL: I was not on site, because usually the Correctional Services [team] were on the ground. A brief description of what happened was that, usually when we planned for an ORP, we would select – not myself, but the Correctional Services and the Police – would join a certain section. At that time, we had different camps or detention centres. We had Whitehead, we had High Island [and] we had another one or two as well. Usually, we would look at the demographics as well as... of course we have to know, because we are only talking about those that have been screened-out, because only those would be repatriated. So we would look at the distribution of the people among the different sections. And then, after identifying one section, the operational departments would do their planning on the actual operation. Staff deployment, etc. And then they would just do it. And then of course in the camp, there would be a lot of rumours that certain dates, the police would come in and grab some people away. And usually, what we understood was that they would be thinking of their defence strategy already.

In the detention centres, theoretically there would be no weapons or whatever. But Correctional Services had shown me so many home-made weapons from, maybe bars, tubes or whatever. Even masks – gas masks – made from plastic bottles or whatever they could find in the camp, whatever materials they could find in the camps to put up resistance. So this was the kind of operation you can imagine. And then as I mentioned earlier on, one of the JP's recommendations was having NGO staff to observe the operation. That, I think, helped in making the operation more transparent. Because you can imagine that this kind of operation was done in the detention centres without public knowledge, no press. So there could be accusations of abuse of power, abuse and violence. But with the NGO staff there, eventually they also came out to say that the enforcement agents in Hong Kong used the minimal force required to accomplish the job.

**I: You mentioned about the presence of the NGO creating transparency in the operations. But does that mean their presence, because of transparency, helps to make the reinforcement people change their behaviour? Or to prevent accusation from the detainees?**

GL: I think it's mainly to prevent accusations. At least, if we have a so-called third party there, in terms of prevention of accusation I think it's useful. At that time, I heard some stories. I don't know how much, because I was not there having first-hand information. I have heard stories from the Police and Correctional Services that sometimes, the Vietnamese 'screen-outs'; they put children and women as shields. As human shields against being repatriated. I suspect there might have been such cases. But I'm not trying to blame it on anyone, because anyone who has gone through such a long way coming to Hong Kong, going through screening and being disappointed in not being screened in and having to face repatriation against their wishes – I can fully understand the mentality there. But I think that no matter on the side of the Vietnamese screen-outs, or the side of the Hong Kong enforcement agencies, I think we were just trying to do whatever was required in the most humane manner as possible. And so, in coming back to your question, initially I think there was quite strong resistance against the repatriation. But we kept on the momentum – although we understood it was a difficult thing to do, a difficult job to accomplish – we kept on with that and gradually the momentum came back. And actually, the resistance level – as I recall – gradually reduced.

Probably because in the minds of the 'screen-outs', they knew that the new Hong Kong Government would come in and do their job no matter what. And so they felt that resistance up to a certain point was futile. So they didn't put up such a strong resistance later on – if I remember correctly. And actually, that fed back to the voluntary repatriation channel quite heavily, because they felt like, 'ok, if I had to go through the voluntary repatriation sometime, somehow, why don't I just go voluntarily [back to Vietnam] and get a small subsidy from the UNHCR and start making a small business back home, rather than waiting here?' And waiting for whatever in the past was not there? So I think eventually the people changed their minds, and I think that's a healthy sign to them, as well as to us, that they were actually wasting their time there.

**I: Did you have any feedback from those who were returned to Vietnam?**

GL: Oh yes. Because the UNHCR actually maintained a program of visiting the voluntary returnees. They didn't visit the involuntary repatriation returnees, but I think they kept a constant program of visitors who had gone back voluntarily. Actually I had a visit together with Mr Peter Lai, I think soon after he took up the Secretary post to Vietnam. I remember I accompanied him to visit the Vietnamese Government in Hanoi in 1994, I think. Or maybe 1995? I can't remember exactly. And we actually went to some of the returnees who had gone back under the UNHCR program.

We visited one of them – I still can remember. He opened a shop for repairing motorbikes. I think he had a mechanics background. And then he took the money from UNHCR, set up a small shop and we went to visit his shop. And he told us that his business had been quite good, and he had been doing quite well – not a very rich lifestyle – but leading a reasonably happy life since then. And then, in terms of the so-called involuntary repatriation returnees, they were visited – if I remember correctly – by the British Embassy there. Because that was under the bilateral arrangement between the UK, Hong Kong and Vietnam. So they visited some of the returnees there. And the reports we received were that they didn't face and persecution, however some of them went back to their villages and took up their previous professions again. Maybe farming, maybe doing other work. But generally, they were ok.

**I: On the policy-making level, working in the Government, could you give me an overall picture of what the whole Vietnamese refugees in Hong Kong was like? And how it affected the people and the Government, being that it was a long stretch – 20-25 years [of dealing with the issue]?**

GL: I just mentioned that my close involvement was only in the years, 1994-1996. But the long history was, I think, speaking as just a Hong Kong citizen, I think the Hong Kong community, generally are very tolerant in terms of receiving refugees. Because we know that, actually, even Hong Kong ourselves, we are also a refugee community – so to speak. Most of the Hong Kong people nowadays, their earlier generations came to Hong Kong in the 20's and 40's. So in terms of so-called providing refuge for people in dire situations, Hong Kong people would generally not have any problems. But the problem is, given Hong Kong's size, and population pressure, we can't be the final destination for most people, unfortunately. So we don't mind playing the role of the 'Facilitator' in the whole process.

But if there is the risk of Hong Kong becoming the final destination for a large number of people, then that would be a totally different story, firstly. And secondly, of course even during transition, so to speak, how we managed those in transit and those in the community would be something we would need to deal with in the Government. Because, obviously if you have a large number of people, even in transit, you have to deal with their accommodation, social services, medical etc. And all these inevitably would be drawing on the resources of the local community. And if these people are stuck here during a long period of time, these people would need to find employment, or some other means of sustaining their lives. And that would mean everyone would be chasing after jobs. So these are the conflicts we need to manage very carefully. So I think during the long stretch of some twenty years, in initially years, I think Hong Kong people had no measured problems, in the sense that those people were quite obviously refugees. And there were stories about them being refused by other countries. Even towing out their boats to the open sea.

So [in] all these stories, the Hong Kong people wouldn't agree to, so providing a place for them to be a 'transit' for eventual resettlement elsewhere, most other people wouldn't have too much of a problem. And the facts were also the same. In the early years of the Vietnamese refugee situation, the resettlement wasn't too slow, if I remember correctly. Up to the early '80's, the resettlement figures were able to catch up with the arrival figures quite closely. So people stayed in Hong Kong as a transit for not too long – usually I think for less than a year. Then they would be able to move on. So Hong Kong people, I think generally, wouldn't mind too much in providing such a so-called facilitation. Actually before my years in 1994-96, actually during my secondary school year in early 1980's, I had done some voluntary work in some refugee camp in Kai Tak at that time. That was with my friends. We worked for Caritas, for bringing some paid groups for children at that time. So generally we didn't have any problems. We found that those people needed help and they were eventually helped by the Western World. And we had provided them with temporary refuge and some sort of social services, so that they can move on.

Generally, [there were] no problems. But when it came to later on, when the Western World's resettlement efforts slowed down because of various reasons, then the burden on Hong Kong became heavier and heavier. And I think in 1989, the Hong Kong Government had to implement a comprehensive plan of action, which entailed a few elements which included setting up detention centres. Previously when the refugees came to Hong Kong they were not under detention centres. They were accommodated under so-called refugee centres, but they kept their freedom of movement. And I think at that time, we even allowed them to work in Hong Kong while in transit, if they really wanted to. But since the number kept growing, firstly, accommodation-wise we couldn't afford them to go anywhere they liked. So we had to find and set up detention centres. We had to restrict their freedom of movement. And by doing



so, not diluting the labour market, so to speak. And then there was the screening policy.

So this was a whole package – detention, screening in. Once they [were determined as] refugees they are resettled with the help of UNHCR. Once screened-out, they would be repatriated, as I mentioned either voluntarily with the help of the UNHCR, or involuntarily under the ORP (Ordinary Repatriation Program). So that is why it is called comprehensive, so as to help handle the situation in Hong Kong, that the Hong Kong community can accept that this is something that there is an end game to, and Hong Kong wouldn't be unduly burdened. Although we were the point of first asylum to provide refuge to the general cases. So that was the theory behind it.

**I: And how did the Hong Kong people react towards the ORP?**

GL: I think [the] Hong Kong people generally, at that time with the CPA, accepted that. Although there were some people who didn't, who felt that this wasn't good enough – that we should have repatriated everyone without screening them, [that was what some people felt] – I think that no matter the difference in opinion, the CPA was eventually implemented. At that time, I remember since we had to setup the detention centres, there was quite a lot of resistance from the districts where we had chosen to set up the detention centres as well. Obviously, which district would want to have a detention centre in its own district! But eventually, we managed to do so.

And, if you ask me, generally the Hong Kong people, they accepted that as a practical or pragmatic approach. Because, otherwise what other options do you have? The only other option I can think of, which was also advocated at that time by some people in Hong Kong was, why don't we scrap the first asylum policy? It was imposed by the British and why should Hong Kong carry on with that, like other countries? Just tow the boats, because 99% of them aren't refugees, just economic migrants? Why don't we just stop it? But we cannot be 100% [sure]. And the facts eventually also show that, no matter how small a percentage, there were still such cases. But of course that figure gradually dropped. Because I think the real cases had already surfaced. Or eventually settled. And because of the change in the situation in Vietnam as well, how can you call, 'maybe persecution', still ongoing in a large scale in those places?

So I think with the numbers still coming [to Hong Kong] we are also convinced that the vast majority are economic migrants. So that's the reason for CPA. And Hong Kong people generally felt that, if that's the case, do it in a comprehensive manner, as long as you screen the people – the resettled ones – Western countries should do their job. They [Western countries] should take those refugees that have been screened in away. And for those that have been screened out, [the] Hong Kong Government should send them away. So that is what the Hong Kong people generally felt. And that continued, until 1997 I think.

**I: While you were trying to send people back to Vietnam, there were still people coming out though?**

GL: Yes. I remember that we had a net gain every month at that time. We sent back, in the so-called 'bad' days of repatriation, I remember sometimes we had less than 1000 departures, but thousands of arrivals. So at that time, we were under tremendous pressure from Hong Kong people, saying that 'your CPA isn't working'.

**I: You mentioned earlier that there was a conspiracy that the Government was trying to sink Hong Kong, because of the boat people arrivals?**

GL: Some commentators felt that the British Government imposed the first asylum policy on Hong Kong, because of course its own international relations reasons. Whereas the Hong Kong people had to pay the bill. There was quite a strong sense of this nature amongst some people in Hong Kong. Because my days in the Security Branch were 1994-96, it was actually in the latter stage of the so-called preparation of the handover of Hong Kong from the British, back to the Chinese Government. So there were also some conspiracy theories at that time, that whether the British Government was determined in the so-called 'clean-up' of the refugee problem before 1997, or whether the British Government was actually half-hearted in doing things, and eventually maybe thousands, or tens of thousands of refugees were stranded in Hong Kong. And they wouldn't care, and would leave the problem with the Chinese Government to deal with.

So there were some doubts at that time about that. So you can imagine, at that time, the psychological pressure on the Hong Kong Government was both from the Chinese Government's side, the local community and we were under tremendous pressure that the ORP actually works. Because that is a very important element in the whole scheme of things. Because if this doesn't work, even voluntary repatriation would not really work. Because they would say that, 'since you can't really push me away, why should I volunteer?' And then people in Hong Kong wouldn't move.

And even worse, how about the other people in Vietnam? If they feel that the Hong Kong Government has no way in actually moving them back, you would attract a continuous out-vote to Hong Kong. So that was the situation we faced, between '94-96. When Whitehead Section 6 riot took place, which is why we were so very worried. And we tried so hard to revive the ORP. Because otherwise, the whole scheme would collapse.

**I: You mentioned earlier that you didn't realise how complicated the whole Vietnamese refugee situation was until you actually took on the role. You explained about the riots, you explained about the difficulties to find the land to build the detention centres for them. And also to carry out the comprehensive plan of action. What are some other key issues that make this whole thing complicated that you can think of?**

GL: I think if you need to deal with it in a 360 degree manner, because we are in the Security Branch, we need to deal with almost all aspects of that. As you just mentioned, when we need to find land, we need to convince the local community where we have chosen the site, to agree to that. Hong Kong is, well, more or less a very open society. We are subject to criticism every day. So if the local community really resists so much, then we will be in great difficulty. And actually, we have in Hong Kong, a political setup in that we have district councils. So we have to convince district councils to accept, and then the district councils would of course give you many conditions – i.e. we would have to do 'A-G' before they would agree to that. So this would be a very tedious, long exercise to convince them.

And secondly of course, you have to properly resource them and give them the proper support in order for them to carry out their duties. The international community of course, we have to maintain very good relations with them because they are eventually the ones who agree to take back those people in any way. [if] they have hesitations, we will have great problems. So that is very difficult. And we have to be very careful about that. With the help of the FCO – the UK Government at the time – we had to do that internationally. The UNHCR of course was our very close partner. We are in a 'love-hate' situation. As usual, it was quite common for the UNHCR with the host Governments; of course the UNHCR is a humanitarian organisation that looks over our shoulder to make sure that we do things properly. And on the other hand, we also would urge them to do this and that, and to expedite all the processes. But generally, we worked with them in a very cordial and pleasant manner.

And of course, on the other side, Hong Kong being a place under the rule of law, we were subject to so many court cases. Because under the detention policy, as I just mentioned, we have the detention policy, we have the screening policy. All these are actually Government Acts. And all of these [Acts] are subject to legal scrutiny. So anyone who feels aggrieved can go to the Hong Kong judiciary system and challenge the decisions. And during my time, I can't tell how many cases I have dealt with. There were – I don't know whether you have heard the name Pam Baker? Pam Baker is a lawyer in Hong Kong. I think the history was, she was recruited to work in the Legal Aid Department in Hong Kong. And eventually, she went out to set up her own office and she specialises in boat people cases, challenging Government decisions. And eventually I think, there were some... initially, she [Pam Baker] worked on her own. Then a few other Human Rights lawyers joined her firm and they claimed that they were working pro bono, without fees. Challenging cases here and there. Decisions of screenings, etc. So I think during my two years I dealt with her, I can't remember how many cases of legal challenges.

So another thing is, we worked very closely with the legal department of the Hong Kong Government in defending our cases. Sometimes we win, sometimes we lose. Sometimes it's really horrible, because they are talking about thousands of people in certain groups that we may have systemically, wrongly screened them out, or whatever. And that became a major issue, because if you are talking 'big numbers', and if the so-called legal arguments for further detaining them is lost in court, we have no choice but to release them. They would be applying for so-called 'habeas corpus', which means you have to release them. The Government has no right to detain them. And we actually faced one or two cases of that sort, towards the end of my time in the Security Branch that they had identified certain groups of people that the argument was that these groups of people would have no prospect of returning to Vietnam.

We fought all the way up the Courts. I think some cases were actually granted by the Courts and we had to release them. And you can imagine the backlash from the local community, [who would state], 'you said [the Hong Kong Government] would be locking them up!' But to avoid any implications to the community, now even with detention policy it is leaking. So those were very difficult days. But having said that, we of course respected the Court's judgement, the rights of whoever, who feels that they have a right to the Courts for their [human] rights. So at least we handled it all in a civilised manner. But sometimes we really had a difficult time managing that.

**I: What were the terms you used that these people would release under?**

GL: 'Habeas Corpus'. This is a legal term.

**I: I wonder if I can find Pam Baker?**

GL: Pam passed away a few years ago. Actually, yesterday when I discussed with PT and Peter, actually were thinking whether some of her colleagues were working in Hong Kong? Because even today, we have quite a few Human Rights lawyers in Hong Kong. Of course they are dealing with other cases, no more Vietnamese cases to deal with. I remember one [of Pam's colleagues] was called Bob Brook. But I don't know if he is still in Hong Kong. Another called Mark Daly. Mark Daly might still be in Hong Kong. He might still have contacts with others, who might still be in Hong Kong.

**I: I'll look into it. It will be interesting to get their point of view.**

GL: They would have a lot of 'real' cases to tell you, because we are a little bit removed from the scenario. But at that time, we were very worried. Brian usually deals with Pam directly, because Brian was also having a legal background. Another person we worked with very closely was called Bill Marshall. Bill Marshall at that time worked in the legal department. He specialises in Immigration, as well as Vietnamese issues. He was out representative in Court. He was actually a Queens Counsel himself. Every day when we received a fax from Pam Baker, usually she would start with, 'this is a letter before action'. And she would state, 'please release so-and-so by this time, otherwise you will see us in Court'. [Laughs].

**I: Where can I get some of these documents?**

GL: I really don't know. Because we are official, we move around offices, we are not allowed to bring documents away. So I don't know whether the Security Branch or Immigration Department still have such documents. You asked me about the complexities. All these are the complexities, because it is a 360 degree job. Because is other jobs, usually you can focus on certain aspects, but you don't have to focus on all aspects. Whereas in the Security Branch, you have to look at policy, from theory, from International politics, from local politics to actual implementation. And another thing, perhaps worth mentioning is for the ORP. It is a joint effort by the Security Branch in conjunction with the Police and Civil Service and Correctional Services Department. In terms of hierarchy, the Branch is the so-called 'boss' of all the Departments. So they all look to the Branch to take the lead in the operation. And so in all the ORP flights, the so-called Commander is from SB, from the Security Branch. And I had the privilege to fly to Vietnam 17 times as the so-called Commander for the flights. And what the flights means, is that after we put all the people on the flights – I think the police would [be able] to give you a much more accurate description – but usually, we book the flights, and then on the flights we usually have either two or three rows. It's not fully seated. It's usually in a row of three. One returnee, one empty seat and then one police officer. So it was one-on-one, very heavily guarded security.

And so every time, in a flight of say, a capacity of 200, you can only return 50 or 60 people because of such an operation. And then, we have to be there. Of course, not for escorting purposes, but we have to be representing the Hong Kong Government in handing over the returnees to the Vietnamese Immigration Officials and signing whatever documents with them. Sometimes, even on arrival, some of the boat people refuse to disembark. And that would be a major problem. We had to use all means and purposes to get them to go down, and so as to complete the whole handover arrangement. Sometimes this process might take hours, until late evening. And there were International flights and restrictions beyond certain hours, the pilot couldn't fly back because of the duration. And then we had to do a lot of contingency planning on that. But luckily, I am still in one piece. I came back every time. I think we, generally speaking, the Hong Kong Government had been trying to deal with the whole problem or the whole situation in the most humane way we could manage.

**I: What was the worst incident you witnessed from one of these flights?**

GL: Not really too difficult during my time. I remember one time, well, one time when we arrived, there were a few – I think a family of three – who refused to disembark. And we tried all the ways to persuade him or her that this is all ready. There is no point in resisting, and actually we told them that all the previous returnees, even under this program, there is no fear at all. The Vietnamese Government kept their word, and that these people just went back to their villages and resumed their normal lives. At that time, I think some of the police officers had a lot of tricks. They had a lot of toys, watches to give away to these people as a gift. After they had been there in Hong Kong for a long time, they [the police officers] tried to convince the refugees that they were friends. I think that eventually worked as well, and after a few hours the family went back home.

**I: For that particular family, how long were they on the flight until they got off?**

GL: I think two or three hours after arrival.

**I: How was it to get them on the plane in the first place?**

GL: In the first place of course, some of them were actually, well of course I would say they wouldn't be very happily going off the plane. You'd have to guide them onto the plane, in most cases. In some isolated cases, they were still struggling. Kicking our colleagues, or shouting etc. But generally I think it was manageable in a sense that they were not too guarded. They somehow wanted to ventilate their disappointment. The way I see it is that it is a disappointment to them, because they had made such a long way to Hong Kong, hoping for a better future. But having gone through all these procedures, being picked and returned – in their minds – in not a voluntary manner, they wanted to ventilate.

**I: So, what did these two years working with the Vietnamese refugee situation mean to you?**

GL: Well for me professionally, I think I have grown a lot. Because I think, even now, looking back after that, I am now in the civil service for over 25 years. I think this was still one of the most memorable posts I have worked in. As I said, it was a 360 degree post, that you don't have the chance to experience in other positions of the same rank. So professionally, I think it is a great exposure for me and a great opportunity for me to train up myself. In terms of the subject matter itself, I actually, at that time and afterwards, I was very affected. Whether what we had been doing was the right thing or not. I think up to now, I still feel that we have done the right thing, despite, as I said, there were criticisms and conspiracy theories that this is something the British Government imposed on Hong Kong. Because the Hong Kong people suffered deliberately, or otherwise. I don't think that there is such a plan at all. Just like history unfolded itself in such a way, that Hong Kong, being geographically located here, and these people need help, they just came here.

And we tried to help them to the extent we could. And when it came to the stage that Hong Kong, feeling difficult in our dealings, we tried to uphold in whatever way we could to deal with it in a most humane manner. I think at the end of the day, it's a humanitarian consideration that prevails. That I believe is right. It's not easy. We had to undergo such a lot of pressure, both within the legislature and local community. It's not easy, not only for me at the so-called policy-making level. In the front line situation, you can imagine it's even more difficult. When you can imagine one of the police officers having to carry out their duties in the detention centres, face-to-face with returnees who are resisting in the most [confronting] way with weapons in hand. You can imagine, it was such a difficult situation. But no matter how, I think we have coped with that. I think this is something that is the right thing to do.

**I: When people mention the words 'Vietnamese boat people', what comes to your mind?**

GL: Actually I feel that Vietnamese people are very friendly. The first time, I haven't had the chance to visit Vietnam after the visit I went to with Peter [mentioned earlier]. The first time I went, or that time I went to Vietnam, the first impression I had was, 'where was the airport?' Because I saw jungle and greenery everywhere and wondered where we were going to land. And secondly, between the airport and Hanoi city centre, I think we took a ride of almost an hour. And it was all greenery. I thought this was such a beautiful place. But, if you don't mind me saying so, very under-developed at that time. But when we went to town, I felt that this is no different to any other place. And we had the chance of going to the city for a short walk, or whatever.

We found out that it's no different from other places. The people are very kind, very gentle. And sometimes we also went into the detention centres to take a look. And the people were very friendly. I remember their food was really marvellous. I still love Vietnamese food so much. Every now and then, my family will enjoy a Vietnamese meal. I don't see any inherent hatred between Hong Kong and Vietnamese people at all. I would say they are no different to any other people. It's only that history was such that we had to deal with it in a very pragmatic – but I think the underlying is – we had to observe the humanitarian side of things.

**I: Thank you very much for the information you have provided...**

GL: I think at the end of the day we are all human beings and this is what civilisation is all about.

**I: Is there anything else you would like to add?**

GL: Not really, I hope you can find more people to give you a more comprehensive picture. Because, as I said, my experience was limited to two and a half years. It was a great experience for me. Not that I am trying to build my own happiness on the sadness of others. But simply, I think, as I said, I myself grew up a lot through that. And I think I learned more through being part – maybe a small part – of the whole process in understanding a lot of the philosophies behind [the situation]. Because I was just an ordinary Hong Kong person living in a district where I was landed with a detention centre next door, I might have a totally different viewpoint. But I think I have the benefit of

looking at things in a more comprehensive manner. I realise that this was, although some Hong Kong people might have felt that they have suffered in some way, I think Hong Kong in its totality had done a proper job, [played] a proper role in the process.

## Second interview

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GL: I think that is a story that I think the Correctional Services would be able to tell you. I heard that there were cases... some of the refugees went back to Vietnam under the voluntary program and they had all their medication having [run out]. So they came back, in order that they could be committed back into the camps again.

**I: You mean they escaped from Vietnam again, just for the medical benefits?**

GL: Yes, just for the medical benefits. And the birth rate was so high, that I heard that a lot of them didn't know, and didn't trust, the medical services in Vietnam [they were not good enough]. So they preferred to give birth in Hong Kong, they would get another \$100 then move back to Vietnam. And so eventually, I think at some stage, the UNHCR also decided that if they are so-called repeated returnees, they would cut down the subsidy. Instead of \$100 per head, I think they cut it down to \$50 per head. Because they also realised that people kept coming back for different things.

**I: But wasn't it dangerous for them to come out from Vietnam by boat?**

GL: I heard it wasn't so dangerous more or less towards the end. It was organised – not trafficking – illegal, immigration routes.

**I: Just a boat trip, knowing that they would stay at the detention centres for a while?**

GL: Just a boat trip. What I heard was, initially of course, it was all boat trips. Long boat trips. What I heard towards the end, was actually they moved by land towards Ghuang Zhe, a province nearest to Vietnam. They crossed the land border, moved to the nearest village where they would land onto boats. Of course with the help of the so-called [snake hands] the organisers paying them some money. And then took a very short boat trip to Hong Kong – maybe less than a week? Probably with some supplies on the boats before they threw everything away. And then landed up here. And so, those are, in most cases, you can imagine economic [migrants]. Some of them, just for medical [reasons]. There were some cases where it seems very funny and whatever. Some of them came back for specialist treatments. For example, bone disease, where they couldn't find specialists in Vietnam.

**I: And would they review that eventually, through investigations through the Immigration Department, that they would find out the true motives?**

GL: These are the motives you can imagine. But you can't really find hard evidence on that. But while they were having sickness in Hong Kong, we would just treat them like any person if they needed to go through the medical treatments, we would [take care of them]. Same with the dental services. They like them [the services] here.

**I: Now let me have an understanding here. When they arrive, before you can determine if they can be screened in or screened out, they will have to go through a waiting period anyway. And usually how long would that take?**

GL: Depends on the case load. The initial stage, where we started with the CPA, of course it took quite a while to get a person screened and going through the screening process. But afterwards, I think in less than six months, I would say.

**I: But at least during those six months they would be fed by the Hong Kong Government, so they would be put in camp anyway?**

GL: Yes. Throughout the whole process anyway.

**I: And after that, being screened out, they would have to wait for a while?**

GL: After they had been screened out, they have a choice at any point in time to raise their hands to say they would like to go back through the voluntary program. They can do it any time during or before the screening out process. If they felt they didn't want to go through the screening process, they could go back at any time.

**I: I'm talking about those who returned on purpose. They prolonged their stay.**

GL: Of course. In some cases, because they knew the rules to get in, they would claim, 'I have killed some people. I have a death sentence on my head. So don't send me back because I will be killed the next day'. They would make such claims as well.

**I: Do they change their identities when they return?**

GL: To our knowledge, no. The Vietnamese Government has, what they call, household registration systems. So usually, firstly before they receive anything, they would receive from our side, the data of the people. They would do their matching on their side. To make sure that we are not sending people not of Vietnamese origin. Because that was another thing. Because Vietnam and China had a war in 1979. And actually, there were quite a lot of people who had been displaced at the border area, which was the area of dispute. And sometimes, they would say, 'these people are not our nationals. They are actually Chinese nationals'. They [the Vietnamese Government] would come back [to us] and say that, and we would have to do our verifications. Sometimes they have such responses. So it's a very elaborate process that we have to make sure every part of it works smoothly.

**I: So you say that the returnees, when they came back, because you already have their data? Their fingerprints? So you can easily spot them? Do they know that?**

GL: Yes, they know. Some of them, I think this is a true story told to me jokingly, that some people who want to have their tooth refilled. So he or she came back. So after filling their tooth, flies back [to Vietnam].

**I: I know that happened, but I hope the numbers are insignificant.**

GL: I think not too great a number, I suspect. Giving birth to children was more prominent. But having said that, after all, giving birth is a [difficult] thing. So if the mother is pregnant, she is already there. For those of course, we would not be using repatriation because that was dangerous. So we would usually allow them to give birth, unless they voluntarily want to return early. Otherwise we will allow them to give birth first.



## Henry Siu

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Interviewee: Henry Siu (HS)  
Interviewer: (I)  
2:45PM, 9 September 2013, University of Hong Kong

**I: Henry, thank you very much for giving me this opportunity to interview you about the Vietnamese boat people. Can you please state for the record your full name, date of birth and where you were born?**

HS: My full name is Siu Chung Kit Henry. I was born in Hong Kong in the year 1948. And I have been working in the Hong Kong Immigration Department for 32 years. I joined the Department in 1973, and retired in 2005. By now, I have retired for about 8 years from the Department.

**I: Are you doing anything now in terms of work?**

HS: No, I am just retired. Enjoying life and travelling around.

**I: So when did you first get involved with the Vietnamese refugee situation?**

HS: My first encounter with the Vietnamese refugees dates back to my job as Immigration Officer at the Harbour Control Section in 1975. And in that year, it was special because that was the fall of Saigon at the end of April (April 30). And then my first encounter with a large batch of Vietnamese refugees on the date of May 4th 1975, when Hong Kong encountered the first influx of Vietnamese refugees on the Clara Maersk. I remembered I was on duty continuously for about 30 hours during the first batch of the Vietnamese migrants.

**I: Did you remember much about that incident?**

HS: I think we waited for the arrival of the refugees coming up to Princess Margaret Hospital which at the time wasn't opened yet. We started clearance from midnight until morning. I think we processed more than 3,700 refugees to have the documentation for each and every one of them before they were housed in Hong Kong.

**I: Did you have notification of the [refugees] arriving, or did they just arrive suddenly?**

HS: We just had... for myself as an Immigration Officer, mainly on anchorage duties clearing ocean-going vessels. Then there were special operations that we had to pull in reinforcements from every section in our department to help cope with such an influx [of refugees]. At first we didn't know how many were involved; not until we had finished did we know that there were over 3,700+ refugees landing in Hong Kong on that night.

**I: Have you ever dealt with refugees before this batch?**

HS: No. It was the first boat load of refugees arriving on Hong Kong shores for the first time. [This] started the Vietnamese saga for many years.

**I: Can you describe to me how the receiving process went? That is, the process of interviewing and receiving them that night?**

HS: Of course you know that these were just refugees being picked up from the container vessel on the high seas.



Many of them didn't have proper documentation, so what we had to do was interview each and every one of them and try to document their personal particulars. And issue temporary papers to them for identification.

**I: Did you have interpreters at that time?**

HS: No. I think we mostly conducted the interviews in English. And then of course when some of them didn't know English, we needed other Vietnamese refugees to assist in order to get their particulars as [accurately] as possible.

**I: So you basically used some of the Vietnamese among the group who could speak English to help out as well?**

HS: Mostly, what we experienced was that most of them were well-off people and Government Officials. One particular incident that impressed me was that they carried small luggage with valuable items that they brought along. Some even opened the bags for us to see, and we saw a lot of money, gold, jewellery and everything. I can still remember that after this, the Hong Kong Government had asked the Bank to come and take stock of all the valuable belongings [of the refugees] to store for them. And after clearance that night, they [the Vietnamese refugees] were shipped to the army camps for temporary accommodation.

**I: How many of you were called in to handle the situation that night?**

HS: I think from my department alone, we had mobilised at least 200-300 people to work on this preliminary documentation for the Vietnamese migrants.

**I: You had to work through the night?**

HS: I myself worked through the night. I remember that it was the longest shift I ever had [to work].

**I: What went on in your mind after receiving them?**

HS: This is the disturbance or fault of the [Vietnamese] Government that caused a lot of problems to each individual and families. Some of them [the refugees] had tragedies and we heard a lot of stories about what happened along the way.

**I: So along the way, these people [Vietnamese boat people] encountered problems that they had to be rescued?**

HS: Yes, [this was discovered] through our interviews. But as far as I know, after this special operation, I didn't have much dealing with the aftermath of them. So far as I can remember, they were the first batch of Vietnamese migrants being resettled very quickly. Most of them had connections overseas.

**I: And then after that, when did you come back to the Vietnamese refugee situation?**

HS: After that, my first proper job with the Vietnamese refugees was in the year 1989 and 1990. And at that time, I was posted as the Assistant Divisional Head of the Vietnamese Boat People Division. At that time we started to organise the review of the policies in handling them, and setting up new camps because of the large influx of the Vietnamese boat people in the late 1980's. And the Division was expanding quickly to cope with the influx.

I remember when we were talking about the screening policy which was introduced later; even [regarding] the Vietnamese interpreters, we employed more than 200 of them. At the same time [however], we had [employed] about 200-300 Immigration Officers to conduct the actual interview. But of course, the main screening part occurred during my second tour of Vietnamese boat people duties during 1992-1993 when we had the proper screening policy introduced in cooperation with the UNHCR.

**I: What was the difference between the two sets of screening policies from 1989 and 1992?**

HS: At first what we were doing on the Immigration side; our proper job was identifying each and every Vietnamese boat person. That is, their particulars, their background and story of coming to Hong Kong and also the genuineness of their claim as to being a Vietnamese refugee. I'll admit that we had quite a difficult task in front of us. I believed that during that time, not many of them were telling true stories. Actually, the nature of the Vietnamese boat people

had changed, because they were actually economic migrants and not refugees fleeing their home country.

After the UNHCR came in, we requested, and also they agreed to provide us with proper guidelines in screening the Vietnamese refugees according to the UNHCR guidelines and criterions. I remember that we spent a lot of time in sending our officers to receive training on the UNHCR guidelines. I still remember the blue handbook on the Vietnamese refugee claims. Our officers spent a lot of time in understanding the International practices in determining the refugee status [of the Vietnamese boat people].

**I: What were some of the reasons that prompted your department to seek help from the UNHCR?**

HS: Actually, I think that a policy of the Hong Kong Government at the time, because of a large influx of the refugees being stuck in Hong Kong. And we had to do whatever we could to get rid of the problem as quickly as we could.

**I: Did the percentage of those 'screened in' change because of the use of the policy guidelines?**

HS: I can't remember the exact number of those screened in against those screened out? I believe the percentage of those screened in is not too high. And it is funny that we spent hours and hours interviewing, and our officer had to write up the reports and make recommendations to the senior officer in determining refugee status. It is funny because once a story of a refugee becoming accepted would be circulated around the camp, and then it would become the standard [story]. And I remember one of the officers submitted his report and he said that he spent almost two weeks in writing up the claim of this refugee family. It is a long and tedious process I would say. And then of course we couldn't prescribe any time limit for the officer to finish the interview. You couldn't stop them from making the claim and finishing the story.

**I: Were the guidelines much different compared to the UNHCR [guidelines]? Before training?**

HS: Before training, of course, as a professional Immigration Officer we had our own standards and set of procedures to obtain information from people, like those applying for visas coming to Hong Kong. Of course this is not applicable to the claim of the refugees. It's different.

**I: What were some of the most difficult tasks you had to handle among these three assignments?**

HS: I think it was the resources and time that we devoted to the entire screening process. It was unbelievable. And the process was slow, I would say. Not to mention, then later on in fairness and equity, we had to introduce the 'read-back' policy. That means that after the interview, through the interpreters we had to 'read-back' what our officer had written in the report to the refugees, before obtaining a signature [from them] to agree on their story and assessment. So it was a long and tedious process and was a big burden on the resources of our Department.

**I: What camps were you working with?**

HS: Whitehead camp was the largest camp at that time, housing up to 24,000 people. And still, we didn't have sufficient space to house all of them. I remember at that time we had set up the High Island detention centre, and later on Tai A Chau. And later on, other smaller camps managed by the Correctional Services Department such as Chi Ma Wan, Hai Ling Chau, Camp Collinson and also some centres managed by the Civil Aid Services and Argyle Street. There were many scattered over the territory of Hong Kong.

**I: Were you ever involved with the repatriation process?**

HS: Yes, I have also taken part in this operation, actually in my first tour-of-duty in 1989 and 1990. I remember that we had full repatriation in parallel; one was the voluntary repatriation where we tried to convince the refugees to return to Vietnam voluntarily. Of course this involved a lot of counselling, and also we had an inducement that each refugee wanting to be repatriated would receive a monetary incentive. I remember at that time it was about \$400 USD per head, which was quite an impressive amount.

**I: Was that money given by the Hong Kong Government?**

HS: Yes, I think so. Of course after receiving the money, it was a tedious process to negotiate with the Vietnamese

Government to receive the refugees. Of course during those times, they agreed to receive back these refugees 'in dignity'. [The Vietnamese Government's terms were] their return 'in dignity'.

**I: What did that mean, their return 'in dignity'?**

HS: I mean that they were not being forced to accept this option. Even for this option, I still remember after their return, some of them double-backed. And they became the leader in finding a boat, and getting the people to come back to Hong Kong.

**I: Was it a high number, or just a few incidents?**

HS: I can't remember, but there were incidents in which they double-backed.

**I: So when you introduced the [monetary] incentive, was it successful to the scheme? Were there a lot of people who volunteered at first?**

HS: I can't remember the exact figure, but in my memory, I think it was a [moderate amount].

**I: What was the second category?**

HS: The second category was mandatory repatriation. I remember I was on the second batch of the mandatory repatriation, what we called the MRP. The first batch, evolved from negotiation with the Vietnamese Government, having them 'return in dignity'. Mandatory repatriation was when they were forced to return, and of course it must have the agreement from the Vietnamese Government.

We hired a Hercules aircraft from Indonesia, if I remember correctly, on some of the chartered flights. Each time, I think we sent about 50 refugees back on the mandatory repatriation exercise, and each flight had Immigration Officers in uniform, representing the Hong Kong Government in bringing these people back to Hanoi. We also had escorts from the Department on the flight. I remember I took part in the second operation; I flew to Hanoi and then handed over the refugees and then returned.

**I: Could you describe that experience for me?**

HS: For the mandatory repatriations, we had to use minimum force to get them up on the aircraft, under our escort and then to Hanoi. Of course upon arrival, we had a lot of counselling [services offered] to their families and those being selected to go back on these flights. Also, upon arrival in Hanoi, of course we couldn't force them to get off the airplane; they had to get off [the aircraft] [on their own terms]. This was one of the requirements of the Vietnamese Government, so we had a lot of counselling to persuade these people to walk by themselves from the aircraft and to be handed back to the Vietnamese Government.

**I: Were they notified in advance [of their departure from Hong Kong]?**

HS: Yes, of course, a few weeks in advance. We would have to undertake all the counselling work to convince them to go back.

**I: Did any of them try to hide or anything like that?**

HS: No.

**I: And what time did you pick them up for the repatriation?**

HS: Well, normally we started our operations very early. The refugees were being housed in different parts of the camp, and normally before the repatriation they would be gathered to stay in one part of the camp. Early in the morning, we would round them up and convey them to the airport. And normally we would start the flight about 8:00am. As I said, before then we had a lot of counselling work [to undertake with the refugees].

**I: How many of these trips have you done?**

HS: It's only one I have done. Later on, there were several. I can't remember the exact number, but as I said they

were performed by different departments in joint operations.

**I: Did you experience any resistance from the Vietnamese people on that trip?**

HS: Not on my flight, but I admit that on other flights, there may be some disturbances and people would have to be restrained and delivered from on board the plane.

**I: You were lucky that your trip wasn't so bad.**

HS: Yes, I was lucky my trip was trouble-free.

**I: Did you ever experience any rioting?**

HS: Yes. We had riots happening in Whitehead, in Tai A Chau. Within these centres, we had officers stationed there to do the screening work. I remember that we received notice that there were signs of disturbances inside and we would have to pull out all our officers from the [other] camps. To suspend our operations.

**I: Did you ever personally experience a situation where there was rioting?**

HS: Normally when such riots happen, because we are not the Department that is involved in containing the riots, it is the job of the Police and Correctional Services Department. So normally we would retreat and go behind the scenes. So we do not have experience on site.

**I: So you would just receive reports on that?**

HS: Yes.

**I: What were some of the main reasons for the rioting?**

HS: I think some were clashes between North and South Vietnamese. Some were frustrated about the long wait to receive their outcome [on achieving refugee status].

**I: On average, how long did they have to stay in the detention camps?**

HS: I think a few years, particularly the highest influx occurred in the late '80s. Even though I remember when we started this whole screening [process] in 1991 or '92, still, even after they had been screened in they would have to wait for the resettlement by the UNHCR which was a long process and a long wait. And some ended up in having criminal offenses in Hong Kong, [making it even worse] for them because resettlement countries wouldn't accept them.

**I: Even though they were already screened in?**

HS: Yes, because there were instances of people escaping from the camp and breaking some laws of Hong Kong.

**I: During your time there, were there any fatal incidents? During the rioting, did people die?**

HS: I think the worst was in Tai A Chau. Of course I can't remember a lot about the casualties in that incident.

**I: In looking back, were there any particular incidents that stand out for you in dealing with the Vietnamese boat people?**

HS: There were changes in policies in dealing with the Vietnamese migrants. Like in those times we had the closed and open camp policies, some of them who were refugees who were screened in were allowed to seek employment and education for minors. So this was a lot of work for the Hong Kong Government. And even especially for the handover of Hong Kong [to China], we had to speed up the 'Vietnamese migrant problem', either in terms of the screening policy or the resettlement of these Vietnamese migrants; [resulting in] a lot of work for the Hong Kong Government in the year before the handover.

**I: There was a lot of pressure? Where was the pressure mainly coming from?**

HS: Yes, a lot of pressure. I think [the pressure was] overall, for the Hong Kong Government to resolve this problem. Even the local community placed a lot of pressure on the Hong Kong Government.

**I: Do you have any personal incidents you remember, good or bad, anything that has remained in your mind over the years?**

HS: The most impressive incidence of course was the clearance of the Clara Maersk. This was the first time ever that we had handled such a large number of Vietnamese refugees to Hong Kong; and then also my experience in searching for the camps in Hong Kong.

HS: Because of the limited space in the existing Hong Kong camps, we had to look for new space [to house the refugees]. Even though we had built the Whitehead centre, this [space] gradually became insufficient because a large number of these migrants were coming to Hong Kong. So we had to start looking for places. I still remember we went on helicopters to go around the entire territory of Hong Kong to look for places, and finally we ended up in Tai A Chau.

**I: Why did you choose Tai A Chau?**

HS: Tai A Chau was on the south-west of Hong Kong, and it was inhabited by people... there wasn't a large existing population there. It was a remote island, and I remember we had a lot of work to build this camp. First of all we had to set up the water and electricity supply and this caused a lot of problems for the architectural services department [who were responsible] for having these basic utilities connected to the island. Also, the levelling of the island to find sufficient space for building the camp was required. I remember that camp housed 5000 refugees and it was far away from the city. At that time, my division was based in Kowloon Peninsula. I remember I had to ferry these officers to the island to undertake their screening work. The journey took almost an hour (each way from my office to the island and then back again).

**I: Was one of the criteria [in looking for a place for the camp] to look for a place that is removed from the city and the rest of the population?**

HS: Yes of course. You know how hard it is, given that it [Hong Kong] is such a small place. We really don't have suitable space for the building of these camps. They really couldn't be placed in the city and most of the surrounding area is hilly. [These are the reasons why] Tai A Chau was one of our options, given that it is remote and [doesn't involve] the removal of [existing] residents from that place.

**I: How long did it take you to build Tai A Chau?**

HS: Just a few months, after all the basic utilities had been resolved.

**I: You used the term 'remote'. Were there requirements to put them in a remote area?**

HS: Actually I think it was the only place we could find at the time.

**I: And how long was Tai A Chau in operation?**

HS: I can't remember, it was after my time and work with the Vietnamese migrants. I think it lasted for about 5-6 years before the whole Vietnamese migrant problem was resolved in Hong Kong.

**I: What does this whole Vietnamese refugee experience mean to you?**

HS: Well it was quite a new experience for [me] and my Department. We had to follow the international patterns on the determination of refugee status. It is a new area of work, and also an international cooperation [between different countries].

**I: So if you were ever given a choice, would you ever do it again?**

HS: I hope it never happens in Hong Kong again.

**I: And if you were given a choice and had to do it again, would you do it differently?**

HS: Of course with the experience we have gained, there might be a slightly different way for us to handle this problem.

**I: Thank you.**

HS: Thank you for your time with me.

## Second interview

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HS: After the return of the Vietnamese migrants back to Vietnam, upon the request of the Vietnamese Governor we stationed [one] Immigration Officer at the British Embassy at Hanoi. Their main job was to monitor the progress of these returnees and how they settled in their home country and also he [the Immigration Officer] would visit them [the returnees] in their various places and how they [assimilated] back into their society. The second point was that among these Vietnamese migrants there are also those known as the 'ECVII's', that is, Ex-Chinese Vietnamese illegal immigrants. Actually, they are not directly from Vietnam. They are sort of Vietnamese migrants who have settled in China for some time, and they found a way to sneak into Hong Kong. They posed themselves as Vietnamese migrants and so we have to distinguish them from genuine Vietnamese migrants. After the determination of their status, if we were sure they were 'ECVII's', we would negotiate with China for their repatriation back to China. We had operations to send them back across the border.

**I: What were the numbers of these returnees?**

HS: I don't have the figure right now in my mind.

**I: Was it a high number? Were there a lot of them?**

HS: Yes, there were quite a number of them.

**I: And what were some of the findings of the [monitoring] Immigration Officer of the returnees?**

HS: I think just to bring some positive feedback to the migrants in Hong Kong that instead of resettlement overseas, they had the option to return to Hong Kong.

**I: So did they find that they [the Vietnamese refugees] were resettling ok?**

HS: Yes, they found that they [the returnees] were re-assimilating into society and they were doing fine. And also it would be an incentive for them to join the voluntary repatriation process instead of waiting for resettlement overseas.

**I: Were there any cases where they were harassed by the Vietnamese Government when they returned?**

HS: No. We didn't hear anything about that.

**I: And how long was the Immigrant Officer in Hanoi for?**

HS: I think we sent two batches of Immigration Officers there; I think from '91-92 to '95 or '96. Yes, [it was a long time] in two batches. When I say 'batch', what I mean is one single officer was stationed there, and each term of their tour of duty was about 2-3 years. So far I remember there were two officers sent there.

**I: And each one stayed there 2-3 years?**

HS: Yes, 2-3 years.

[General discussion between Henry and someone else]

HS: I remember in those times I worked at the border in the early '80's. I started managing the control point and I also looked after the 'ECVII' Centres there. We had a number of operations for returning [the refugees] back to Mainland China in the morning at 8:00am.

[male]: I did that, the very first one by truck as well at three separate centres. Because of the UNHCR – or somebody's rule – there was supposed to be one 'responsible officer' there to hear last minute appeals. So I had to spend overnight with the refugees in winter, and it was freezing cold. We didn't get around to sleeping. We had to stay awake the whole night, it wasn't fun.

HS: Tak Ku Leng [at the Hong Kong border] is the coldest spot in Hong Kong.

[male]: And those holding centres were very much bare concrete. Anyway, those were the days. The first train was physically quite easy, because it was a nice, comfortable railway train. The only problem was the loading, because they had to specify 'Car No: 1' would have 'A, B, C, D, E'. [This was because] every station that the train stops at was detached. This goes all the way to the last train, so it was about working out who goes into which car. [This was because] there were 600 hundred of them and they were dispersed in different detention centres in Hong Kong. What we had to do was the day beforehand, we had to send our teams of police officers to round them up and put them in one single institution. And that was the Victoria Detention Centre in the central [Hong Kong]. And then on that night we would have to send the whole convoy of trucks for [all] 600 of them. [And there was] probably an equal number of trucks for police officers and immigration officers all the way from Hong Kong to the border.

HS: That would be about 30kms. An impressive convoy I would say.

[male]: It's actually more difficult that you would think, to work out, for example, if you have to do the convoy, remember that for every single car there is a time lapse of a number of seconds. When you calculate how long it takes to go from Victoria [detention centre] to the [Hong Kong] border, you can't just simply do it [by simple calculation].

HS: [Laughs].

**I: Had anyone written about this in a chapter yet?**

[male]: Well each of these exercises we had to do an 'operation order'. On that occasion, the police tried to 'pull a fast one' on us and say to us, 'why don't you write it?' [Laughs]

**I: Thank you very much. This is a very complicated matter.**





## Huong Thanh Vu

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Vu Thanh Huong was an unaccompanied boat person arrived Hong Kong in 1987

Born in 1973 in Ha Noi, Vietnam. Huong was second youngest among 9 children.

She was 14 when her parents told her she had to leave Vietnam. There was only one space left on the boat, she her parents sent her alone.

Alone and scared, Huong grew attach to a Vietnamese boy (16 years old) and his family, they escaped on the same boat. When arrived in Hong Kong, she stayed with his family in Shum Shui Po camp. Huong was offered resettlement in the US, but as a young girl, lacked of understanding and guidance. Huong thought that if she stayed with her boyfriend, she would be able to go with him and his family to their resettlement country. It turned out that his family was accepted to go to France and she was not. By that time, she also lost her chance to go to America.

Two years later her boyfriend was addicted to drug, so his family left him behind with Huong and went to France. As soon as Huong turned 16 she began to work in factories, he boyfriend took almost all the money she earned to buy drugs. She constantly beat her up and no one in the camp would protect her.

At 17, she was pregnant, her boyfriend continued to abuse her. She gave birth prematurely, the baby was in intensive care for one month. Her boyfriend never once visited her and their child.

Couldn't take any more physical abusiveness, Huong requested to move out (to another section within the camp). Her boyfriend stabbed her, in the face. He was taken to jail for a short while then was released back to the same camp, which was Pillar Point.

Huong immediately moved in with another young Vietnamese refugee because she needed protections (it's very dangerous for female to live alone in the camp). He was also a drug user. Because she was in so much pain from the stab wound, her new boyfriend gave her some drug to help her sleep. Unfortunately, Huong became addicted. Her boyfriend supported her addiction until he was caught dealing drugs and was sent to jail. Huong then moved in with another new boyfriend, who was also a drug addict. He too was caught and was sent to prison. This time Huong was alone. To support her addiction, Huong worked for drug dealers; she picked up drugs in town (they usually secretly met in public toilet), she hid them in groceries bags and brought them back to camp, processed, packed them in smaller portions and sold them, Huong would then receive some small share of the drugs from the dealer for her own need. After a while, afraid of being caught, Huong quit dealing and resorted to stealing to support her addiction. One day she was caught and received a warning from police.

Huong stopped dealing and stealing but still addicted to drugs. She nearly killed herself by injecting chemicals into her body.

In 1994, James Ginns took over the management of the camp and he helped to send Huong to drug re-habitation at a local church. While she was there, James took her little girl (her name was Cam Anh) to school and brought her back to the church everyday.

Eventually, Huong stayed off drugs, she met a young Hong Kong man who was also there for drug re-habitation himself. A year later, they got married and had two children.

Cam Anh is now 23, recently graduated from college. She is currently working and helping her parents.

Huong and her husband are still working at the same church to assist other drug users. Yearly, they raise funds to assist orphanages in Vietnam.



## Huynh Quoc Do



Interview date: 12 November 2012  
Time: 12:00 pm  
Place: Headquarter of the Christian Action Hong Kong (HK)  
Name: Huynh Quoc Do  
DOB: 13 May 1922  
Place of birth: China

Mr Huynh was born in China 1927, in 1936 he and his family migrated to Vietnam. They settled in Sa Dec, South Vietnam and he was sent to school in Saigon where he learnt languages, including French, Chinese and Vietnamese. In 1948 he was sent to HK to live with his uncle.

Mr Huynh's involvement with Vietnamese boat people (VBP) started in 1979 and he continued to work at various refugee camps until he retired in 1995. He started working at the Jubilee refugee camp, later was transferred to YMCA and finished at Kai Tak North. His works with VBP included managing the students at the English school at Jubilee, secretary at the newsletter room and food distribution.

At 90, Mr Huynh still remembers many tales from the times he worked with the VBP. He told the story of the VBP who stayed at the camp next door called the HK Christian Services. The two camps were separated by a wall, some

of the VBP from the HK Christian Services would sneak into Jubilee for food because they think the food there was better, they also wanted to stay away from the drug problem at their camp. Mr Huynh let them stay for food but made them sweep the ground before they return to their camp.

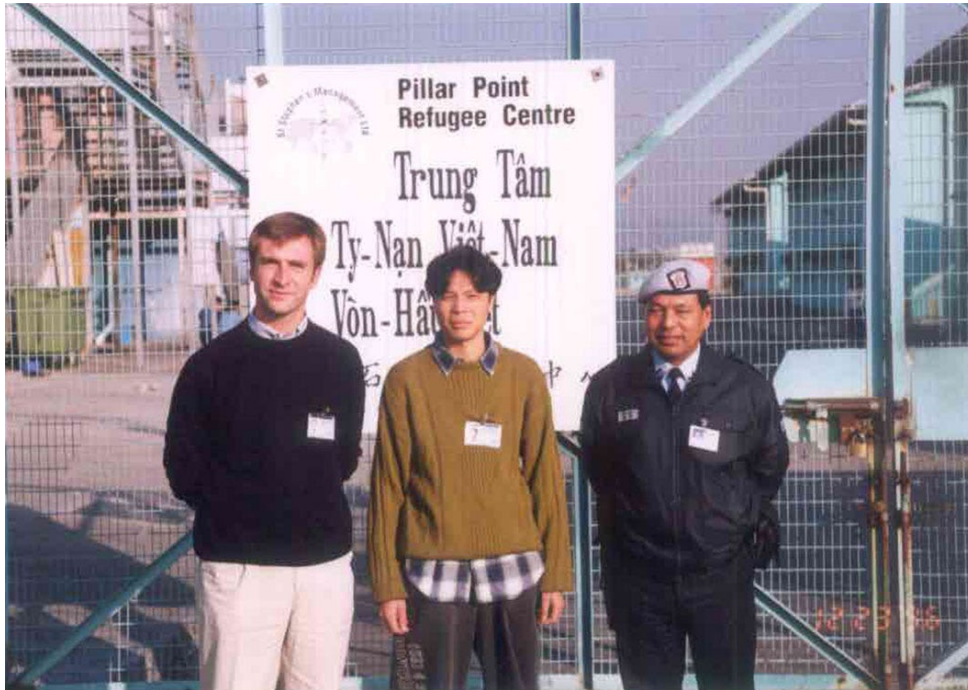
Mr Huynh recalled an incident at Jubilee before the camp was closed where a Vietnamese refugee stabbed and killed an ethnic Chinese refugee. The perpetrator went to prison and after he was released from jail he as given resettlement in the UK.

Mr Huynh said that there were VBP from North Vietnam bullied other refugees in the camp and demanded money or valuables, but the victims did not dare to report. Because he is Vietnamese, some of the refugees shared these stories with Mr Huynh.

Last week, Mr Huynh was very touched by a former Vietnamese refugee who was liked a daughter to him when she was in the refugee camp in HK. She resettled in the US, got married and on the way to their honeymoon in Japan she and her husband stopped by HK to pay him a visit.



## James Ginns



Interviewee: James Ginns (JG)  
Interviewer: (I)  
3:20pm, Saturday 5 January 2013, Office McCain, Hong Kong

**I: Can you please state your full name and where and when you were born?**

JG: My name is James Ginns. I was born in 1968 in the city of Leicester, UK.

**I: How long have you been living in Hong Kong?**

JG: This is my fourth time now living in Hong Kong. The first time was in 1987, when I came original to teach English in one of the refugee camps here. Then I had a spell from 1991 – 1992, and again from 1994 – 1999. And now I am back again. I have been back since 2007.

**I: What brought you here the first time?**



JG: Originally I came because I finished school in the UK, and I had a gap year between school and university. One of my school friends told me there was a great need for English teachers in Hong Kong to teach in the Vietnamese camps here. And I thought I had a very privileged upbringing up til that point. I had been brought up in a boarding school and I thought that this would be something that would be good to do, in a way that I could 'give back' something that year. So I arranged to come here by ship. I worked my passage as a deckhand on a container ship, and arrived in 1987. And started teaching English at the Chi Ma Wan refugee camp.

**I: Did you call yourself a 'boat person' too?**

JG: [Laughs] I was a different kind of boat person.

**I: Did you know anything about the Vietnamese boat people then?**

JG: I have to say, no, I knew very little. Only what I had read in newspapers. I had never been to Vietnam, and having heard about the camps here, I then wrote to a few agencies and had a reply from an agency called International Social Services (ISS) under whom I taught in the camp in Chi Ma Wan.

**I: What was the experience like for you?**

JG: It was very moving. It was my first experience of being with refugees and [seeing] the hardship they were encountering. They were in a closed camp, surrounded by high fences and barbed wire. In a very remote location on the southern tip of Lan Tao island in Hong Kong. Men, women and children packed into huge huts – like very big huts that looked a bit like aircraft hangars. But with multiple levels of bedspace. And family upon family living on top of each other. And I had never experienced anything like that before. And I got generally quite close to some of the people I was teaching. And I was very hopeful that some of them would be resettled. But ultimately most of them in that camp – I think, of the ones I knew – were resettled. To countries like Norway. I remember one of my close friends went to Norway. Others went to the States and Canada. Finland even! I don't know how they are suffering in the winter in Finland [laughs]. They probably are used to it by now.

**I: And this lasted a year?**

JG: Yes, I only had a year between school and University. I used to teach in the afternoons. I worked for the 'Mission for Seamen' in Kowloon in the mornings, because they gave me accommodation. Then after a year I went back to the UK.

**I: After you taught them English [for a year], what did you learn from the Vietnamese boat people?**

JG: I learnt a lot. I have to admit I didn't learn a lot of Vietnamese. They tried, but I wasn't a good student of Vietnamese. So I learned a lot about how they got to Hong Kong, and the sort of, genuine suffering they had on the way. And the sort of journeys they had. They told me a bit about that. And how they basically had left everything. They had nothing, really, at all. Except each other. Some of them had family members, but some of them had come away from family. So their family was in Vietnam and they were going ahead alone. So they had no family with them. And they had left children behind, they had left wives in some cases. They had left fathers, mothers. And it was very humbling for me. I had never come across that kind of thing before.

**I: What brought you back the second time?**

JG: I came back to Hong Kong to work. I got a job with the Squire Group in the UK, and they posted me to Cathay Pacific airways which are part of the Group. So I started working in Hong Kong with Cathay. And I had a year in Hong Kong then I went to Paris in '93 with Cathay. I had gotten married by then. I met my wife to be during my first year in Hong Kong. And then we came back to Hong Kong in 1994, and I was still with Cathay. And I was doing some work with an NGO in Hong Kong at the time called 'St Stephens Society'. Both of us had links with Stephens, and they had done a lot of work with drug addicts in Hong Kong, particularly in the Kowloon Walled City, which was one of the old areas in Kowloon where there were a lot of drug problems. And for a while, they [St Stephens Society] had been working in some of the refugee camps, because by then, the Hong Kong Government had decided to open some of the camps.

So I believe that I am right in saying, some of the people whom I had worked with in Chi Ma Wan and had ended up in a camp in Tuen Mun called 'San Yek' – which was industrial building in Tuen Mun. Tuen Mun was a town in the

territories and that was a kind of transitional camp. And in the end – those people and others – they put in an open centre called Pillar Point. And the idea was that if they opened the camp, then people could go out and get jobs and work experience and make themselves more – I suppose – attractive to resettlement countries. I suppose that was the thinking as I understood it. And what had happened was that actually many of them had gotten involved with drugs. Either selling or trading drugs or taking drugs. Or both. And it got to the point where at Pillar Point, almost every adult male was on heroin.

I: [Gasps].

JG: Practically. Pretty much. Or had been [on heroin]. So it was [becoming] increasingly difficult to resettle people. And these were the remaining refugees in Hong Kong. So the other camps had people who had arrived after the cut-off point. And who were basically detainees. They were not refugees. And they were held pending repatriation to Vietnam. The original refugees were, I think, about 1,800 by the time I was involved again in '95 at Pillar Point. And as I said, increasingly difficult to resettle as many of them had gotten into drugs and crime by this point in these camps that had opened. And they had criminal records.

I: Were they already screened out, or were they waiting for their status to be determined?

JG: They were refugees. All of the people in Pillar Point were refugees at that time. So they didn't need screening, but they were waiting to be resettled. And some of them did get away to be resettled. And there was a trickle of resettlement going on. But many of them were stuck, because they were on drugs and couldn't be resettled. So the UN was very excited by the work of St Stephens, because St Stephens seemed to have a very high success rate in terms of getting people off drugs. And they had seen a lot of refugees coming off drugs and therefore able to resettle. They could pass the tests – they had to go through urine tests, etc. – in order to be deemed to be clean in order to be resettled. And on the basis of that, the UN basically approached St Stephens Society and said 'we'd like you to come and manage this camp now, so we can get as many of these people resettled as possible. We need you to come in and become involved heavily here'. And St Stephens at the time approached me – actually, over dinner – and said, they had this opportunity. St Stephens didn't manage things, they were good at working with drug addicts but they didn't manage things. So St Stephens asked if I could manage the camp for them, and setup a team to do that. And they would work underneath that umbrella and do the drug [rehabilitation] work. And something in me said, 'yes, I need to do that'. So I wrote to the company and said I had this opportunity to go and manage this refugee centre and that I would love to go and do it for two years, then come back.

I was [essentially] asking them if I could go and [manage the refugee camp]. And the company came back to me within about three days and said 'yes, go and do that. And then of course come back to us'. I had to resign to go and do it, but then come back [to the company]. So that gave me the safety net I needed to go back to [St Stephens] to say I would give everything up to go and do it. And what I didn't know – at that point – was that there wasn't a consensus within the UN here, as to St Stephens' involvement in the management. So part of the UN team were very 'for it' and wanted it to happen, and wanted to actually have a separate camp set-up in parallel with Pillar Point, where drug addicts who had come off heroin could be taken out of the camp and put into a new camp. This is a new camp that would be drug-free. And they would be looked after in that separate camp. And that was very much the idea I was told about – to manage that [new] camp. That those [refugees] who could be resettled would be slowly taken out [of the original camp] and put in this parallel camp for resettlement. The other part of the UN team were not happy with that idea. They didn't think it was workable and supported the existing management within Pillar Point. And so I didn't realise, having given up my job, I'd have a battle on my hands to persuade the UN that this was actually something we should – and could – do. And we could do a better job for the refugees than was being currently done. But we did manage to persuade them, and so we set-up the team. And I setup a management company from scratch.

We setup to run all of the community work in the camp, all the maintenance and all the administration and all the security. And this was a security nightmare. Pillar Point had Chinese gangs on the 'outside' trading drugs to Vietnamese gangs on the 'inside'. Obviously 'outside' and 'inside' are easy [terms] to say as this was an open camp, so the Vietnamese were mobile around Hong Kong and could bring in the drugs into Pillar Point very easily. A lot of the drugs were then being traded out to the airport platform. A new airport was being built then, a lot of airport workers were taking drugs. And the Vietnamese were controlling the [drug] trade to the airport platform from Pillar Point. The fencing around Pillar Point was, there was no secure perimeter. So it was all crumbling. Within Pillar Point, little children were running around and stabbing their feet on needles. There were needles strewn on the ground, [which was] obviously very dangerous health-wise. They were getting needle stab wounds. A lot of violence in Pillar Point as well, related to drugs and related to mainly male addicts who beat their wives for money. And a lot of domestic violence. So when I arrived at Pillar Point, there were 8-10 ambulances being called a day for different incidents.



The police at the time largely saw Pillar Point, I think, as being really too hard to handle. And if the violence was 'Vietnamese on Vietnamese' they just let it be, really. So they did patrol, and they had taskforce presence in and around. But to my [knowledge] it just didn't seem to be terribly effective. And again, when I took this on, I had no idea of that kind of situation. So the first thing we needed to do was to get a reliable security presence in order to secure the camp. And I had spoken to a friend who had been an army officer with the Ghurkhas. The Ghurkhas are a people [group] in Nepal who had supplied soldiers to the British army. And they were well-known in Hong Kong for being pretty tough, pretty reliable soldiers. And a friend of mine – I asked him if we could use Ghurkhas for the job. I thought they would be pretty good because they couldn't speak Vietnamese or Chinese and could secure the perimeter and they were [known for being] very loyal and very reliable. And he [my friend] said yes, absolutely, they [the Ghurkhas] would be very good at that. And the previous management told me that if we put Ghurkhas on the ground, there would be a riot. So I had to make a decision. And I decided we do it, and we basically work with the UN and we had a contract with a company that supplied a security team of Ghurkhas. And that security team we employed 24 hours in the camps. And eventually we rebuilt... we still had an open camp with a gate, but we rebuilt the fence around the camp to stop the drug trade going in and out. And secure the people inside the camp, because there were a lot of vulnerable people inside the camp. And so slowly, we got the security situation right. And the number of violent incidents in the camp dropped. And we had less open drug trading going on. And I think the drug use in the camp slowly dropped as a result of that. And so we could focus on the community work we were doing, the administration and so on.

I had a wonderful team of people – obviously Ghurkhas on the security side speaking Nepali. We had 'walkie talkie radios' so I could hear Nepali going on the radio. And we had Vietnamese – I employed quite a number of Vietnamese people who had been involved with different NGO's [for] refugees over the years. And they had been refugees themselves. And they came onto the team and did community work and interpreting work and that kind of thing. And we had Vietnamese on the radio too. And then, we had a wonderful couple who the husband was a former refugee himself. He had been in the camps in Malaysia. And he had resettled to Australia. And there he met a lady who had worked in the camps in Hong Kong who had then gone to Australia with him. And I asked those two – the husband and wife – to come back and run the community work team. Because they could both obviously speak Vietnamese. And so they were there as well in amongst the community work team. And we had a team of maintenance workers as well.

I had a former New Zealand farmer, who came up from New Zealand to help us with the maintenance work. He was as tough as nails, but he got the camp into good shape in terms of maintenance. And so all these different people came together in this team. We had a wonderful team. And slowly but surely, we found refugees who were unable to help themselves because of the drugs. And we identified those who actually wanted to 'clean up'. And [we] put them in the direction of St Stephens, and quite a number of them continued to come off drugs. And many of them resettled. And slowly, the camp came into shape, and we started finding that amongst the Pillar Point population, there were quite a lot of very vulnerable people. People that couldn't resettle because they were mentally handicapped. And those people had basically been neglected, and they had shut themselves into their rooms in the camp. And often didn't go outside, or if they did, they were abused and bullied by the other camp residents. Some of them. And we basically identified who these people were.

In many cases, we had to go in and persuade them to come out of their rooms – sometimes for the first time in a very long time. They were, in some cases, malnourished. It was unbelievable, the shape they were in. And we got them in touch with various Social Services that could look after them. We got them protected, and did our best to look after them. Some of them were resettled. But it was harder with the people who were mentally or physically handicapped. So Pillar Point, sort of, [made up of] 'remnants' of the Hong Kong refugee population who had ended up there. Some of them because of drugs, some of them because of [their past] criminal records. One guy had 32 convictions since coming to Hong Kong. So he had been convicted 32 times since he had arrived in the camps in Hong Kong. So some of them were definitely criminals in Vietnam as well, and continued to be criminals. Then we had people who, as I said, mentally or physically handicapped. They hadn't done anything wrong, they just weren't attractive to resettlement countries. And then we had the families of drug addicts, who were perfectly fine, but let down because one of their family – maybe, in many cases their father – was on drugs and couldn't look after them. And was taking all the money the family had to buy drugs. So the whole different group of people who ended up being this remnant of refugees.

### **I: How many of them?**

JG: When we started, about 1800. And when we finished, maybe just over 1000. So about 800 were resettled during my time at the camp.

### **I: Was that camp under the responsibility of the UN?**

JG: Yes it was.

**I: Because it didn't sound like the [Hong Kong] Government was involved.**

JG: The background to this – and again, I didn't know anything about this when I took on the job – was that the UN were responsible for the camp. And it was on the UN budget. So as a management company, we were employed by the UN. And we had a budget from the UN, which was quite limited, but we had a budget. There was an ongoing battle between the UN and the Hong Kong Government. The Hong Kong Government were trying to hold the UN to account for the money that had been spent in looking after the Vietnamese refugees in Hong Kong over many years. And the Hong Kong Government had to pay a lot of money to support the ongoing effort in that way. And basically wanting to hold the UN to account for that.

The UN were saying that it was Hong Kong's responsibility I think, and it was an ongoing tussle between the two. So the Hong Kong Government wanted minimal involvement in Pillar Point. Minimal. Minimal. So I tried to speak to the various representatives of the Government and Security Bureau to say that we had a real situation here, with people in desperate need, and you [the Government] needs to open up Hong Kong Social Services and offer these people help. They need Social Services very badly. We had mentally handicapped people who needed help. We had people who were being abused in terms of domestic violence who needed help. We needed more policing, we needed more support from the Security team.

My Security team were out on the frontline there, trying to hold this perimeter and trying to secure this camp. We needed the help and support. And we had very little response. Fortunately, there was one man in the Government who was brave enough to step forward and say that he could do what he could to help. And that was Ian Stracken, who was at that time Director of Social Welfare who stepped forward to say he could do what he could [to help], in terms of making social welfare facilities and people available to us. So that was one channel whereby we got some of the mentally handicapped people able to be cared for. But the other thing the Hong Kong Government was worried about was committing to these people, a) because of the UN and what they needed to hold the UN to account for, and b) it was not known what was China's attitude toward the remnant refugee population when the handover occurred in 1997 which was just looming, just ahead. This was at '95, '96. So in '97 there was the handover to go through and nobody knew how China would react. So those were the things on the minds of the Government at that time.

**I: So they tried not to have anything to do with the situation?**

JG: They washed their hands [of it]. And then it got even more complicated, because as I said, there was a plan to put a parallel camp into place. That very quickly died a death, because the UN wouldn't pay for it, the Government wouldn't cooperate and offer any more land for that camp to be set up. So it was not possible. So the whole idea of taking refugees out to be protected that had come off drugs couldn't happen. And we had to try protecting them where they were in the camp. And on top of that, it got really complicated because there was an NGO at that time, operating quite successfully in court against the Government in Hong Kong, led by a lady called Pam Baker. And I can't remember the name of the NGO now, but basically they were taking to court cases of detainees who had been screened out, but who, in their view were being illegally detained. And they won a succession of cases, and they Government had only one place to put these people. And that was in the existing open camp. So they came to Pillar Point and they basically put all these people into the same camp as the refugee population. And so we had to look after those people as well. And those people we had to protect from the existing population.

It was such a problematic population already, in many ways, and then you had a group of former detainees coming out of closed detention centres in Hong Kong because they had won legal cases. And there were hundreds of them arriving in Pillar Point, needing to be housed [and] needing to be looked after. And we took those people on as well, and did our best to protect them and look after them at the same time as looking after the existing refugee population. But it got very complicated. I hope we did a good job, I mean we really tried our best to protect them and to look after the two populations side by side. And it was tough for the people who had just come out of the detention centre and didn't have refugee status. They were in real limbo. Everybody was in limbo at Pillar Point. Even if you were a refugee, you were already in limbo because you had been waiting for so many years. But the detainees were in even more 'limbo'. They could volunteer to go back to Vietnam to be repatriated, and that was about the only option left to them.

So at the end of two years, having got the camp secured, the vulnerable looked after, the children protected, we basically said to the UN, 'look, there is only one option here. You need to close this camp and you need to allow the remaining population to stand on their own two feet and to look after themselves. And then the drug addicts will – we think – shape up. They will have to come off drugs because they will stop being supported on a UN budget, on NGO

funds from the UN and they will have to face reality. Which is that they will stay in Hong Kong'. That's where this remnant population will be. What already many of them were living in downtown, a place called San Sri Po, they were moving between the camp and San Sri Po quite a lot. So some of them were already living in the city, and moving between the two. And of course the UN said no, they couldn't possibly do that. The Government would never allow the camp to be closed and the UN wouldn't make that case. And I presented the same case to the Government, to the Security Bureau, who said the exact same thing. That's not going to happen. The camp will remain open.

So our response to that was that in the best interests of the people, we will stop managing it and pull out at this stage. Because we were just managing it to status quo. It was not helping anybody. And we got a lot of criticism for doing that, from the Government, from the UN and the other NGO's operating in the camp that were happy with managing it at status quo. We said that these people need to settle here, and the best way we can help to make that happen was to pull out and see what happens. And sure enough, the camp closed. But not immediately. I think we left at the end of '96 and I believe it was closed in 2001 or 2002. Maybe four or five years later. And people settled into Hong Kong. But at least by the time we had finished, we made sure that everyone was provided for in terms of security and protection. And as many resettled as possible.

**I: Would you have stayed on past the two years if things were different? Or you thought that was enough?**

JG: I think in terms of the interests of those we were looking after and those we were serving – the people in Pillar Point – it was not in their interests for us to continue. Everybody was relying on us, and we felt that by stopping at that point, we would make people in the Government and the UN think about the wisdom of continuing with operating Pillar Point under those circumstances. It wasn't right for the people, it wasn't right for the way that UN funds should be spent. There was no – in my view – responsibility in the way that was done. The UN shouldn't have been so, sort of, 'not generous' was not the word. Precious UN funding should not have been spent on that remnant population at that stage. It was time for them to settle into Hong Kong. Now the UN would say that the Hong Kong Government wouldn't let them, so we had no choice.

**I: So the group of people who were there at Pillar Point were there because of a particular category? Were they trouble-makers, did they have any riots?**

JG: As I said, they were the remnant of the Vietnamese population in Hong Kong and were there for a number of reasons which stopped them [from] being resettled up to that point. So either they had a criminal record since coming to Hong Kong or they had a drug history or an existing drug problem. Or they were families of people in those categories. Or they were detainees who had been released from detention centres into Pillar Point who couldn't be resettled and were due to be repatriated and the Vietnamese Government wouldn't send back. So a whole combination of [issues]. Or they were mentally and/or physically handicapped and resettlement countries hadn't taken them. Or a combination of those.

**I: And sadly there were children who were stuck there.**

JG: They were stuck there, largely because of their parents. Yes, it is really sad. And there was a lot of violence. The Ghurkhas had to do a lot of disarming of people with knives. And I organised with the police a security sweep of the camp every month to six weeks. And there was a large cache of weapons found every time they did the security sweep of the camp. They found large numbers of weapons. So it was a violent, drug-ridden, tough place for children growing up. Very difficult. I'll give you an individual story. When we arrived – this is just one story – the community work team found a Vietnamese lady who very badly wanted to come off drugs. And at the time, she was close to dying. She was injecting into the one vein left where she could inject heroin into which was in her thigh. And she was living in the camp. But her daughter was also with her. I think her husband was in prison. And that's another aspect to this I haven't mentioned yet. Quite a number of the Vietnamese population at Pillar Point were in different prisons in Hong Kong for different offences.

We had quite a large number of people who we didn't see because they were in different prisons in Hong Kong. Some of them are still there. They were on the caseload for Pillar Point, but they were in prison. When we started, they had never been visited by anybody. So we had to go through the list to work out who was in prison 'where', and go out to visit as many as we could during the time we were there. Anyway, I think the husband of this lady was in prison. Or they had separated, I can't remember. She was on her own anyway, with her daughter. Anyway, she badly wanted her daughter to be protected and looked after. The daughter was at that stage, about 7 [years old]. So the daughter went out to live at St Stephens. And she was living in a house quite close to where I was living. I wasn't living in the camp – it was too dangerous. I lived outside and drove to the camp each day. So what I did was,

I brought her to school in my car in the morning. So she came into the camp with me each morning, went to the school in the camp and went home with me in the evening. Or with one of the team. And the daughter's name was given a Chinese name, 'Su Yen'. And the lady – her name was 'Huong' – decided to go to St Stephens and come off drugs. So she left the camp and came off drugs successfully at St Stephens. And that was good, she stayed away from drugs and stayed outside the camp.

Su Yen kept going to school there until we finished. And then about two years ago, I had a letter which came to me at Cathay. Now I'm back in Hong Kong, I got a letter. The letter was passed to me via somebody else. And it was from Huong. And she wrote to me in Vietnamese and she had it translated into Chinese, and then someone else helped me translate it into English. And she wrote to me to say thank you. And she wanted to update me about what happened. And she had gotten married to a Hong Kong guy. And they were both working with St Stephens still. And she is still with St Stephens, living in the territories with a new family. Su Yen was then about to go to University to study Sociology. And she had three more children. So the family were all still together, still living here. And so I wrote back and said, 'would you like to visit [me] at Cathay?' And we set up a visit and the whole family came to visit me at Cathay, and we had lunch near the office at Cathay outside the airport. And it was good to reunite and to see what had happened. That was just one case. A successful case, a nice story.

**I: So Huong was young at the time?**

JG: Yes, I guess when she came off drugs she was in her late twenties. I'm guessing. Mid to late twenties.

**I: I can understand now why you continued to work in that environment. What about your security, your safety?**

JG: There was one occasion where the Ghurkhas were attacked. They did their security job, they were at the gate. A group of men came in quite late at night one evening, and they were challenged to produce their ID. And they refused. And then they started attacking the Ghurkha guards. And we only had a team of 22 Ghurkhas. So only 10 or 12 could be on duty at any one time. So they were completely outnumbered, because the group of men grew bigger and bigger and they were surrounded. So they [the Ghurkhas] retreated, to a control unit around the gate we had put in, a metal container. And they shut themselves inside the metal container. And they called me, late at night. Maybe 1-2am, and said they were surrounded and had the potential for a riot. They had called the police and said to me I'd better come in. So I went over there in the middle of the night.

And I had a Security Manager, a former Ghurkha Manager who was there with them. And basically they decided they wouldn't fight back because if they had, there would have been a riot. We had installed a camera at the gate, so we knew [from the] video who it was that had attacked them. And there was a group of three men there who, two weeks later, attacked somebody very badly in the camp. All three of them were involved in another incident. And as I remember, they were arrested for that. Not for the attack on the Ghurkhas, but they were arrested for the attack on one of the other residents. And all three of them were sent to prison for quite a long time I think. A number of years, whether they are out now I don't know. So slowly but surely, we managed to get the real trouble-makers. And that helped to clean the place up. But yes, it felt dangerous. It was very dangerous for the Ghurkhas. Not so much for me, because I wasn't there overnight. But I was there during the day when people were running around with knives and causing trouble. Needles with drugs. It was definitely a dangerous environment to work in. My first Maintenance Manager resigned because he found it too violent, too difficult to work there. And he came to me and said it was too dangerous, he couldn't do it anymore.

**I: Were you concerned about AIDS?**

JG: Yes, obviously with needles like that, and with a lot of residents sharing needles – there was a practice of sharing needles to inject. There was a major problem with HIV transmission, so yes, a real problem. I think the other agencies in the camp, and ourselves as well to some degree, did as much HIV education as we could do with the residents there.

**I: Was there any real cases of AIDS or any concerns?**

JG: I only know of one confirmed case during my time there. Only know of one. But how and when the transmission in that case happened, I don't know.

**I: Where did the detainees get the money to support their drug habits?**

JG: because Pillar Point was an open camp, many of them were working in construction. A lot of them were working on construction at the new airport platform. The new airport was being built at that time and was scheduled to open in 1998, a year after the handover. So major construction was happening in the mid-'90s. And construction was quite well-paid at the time. They were earning money from that. So I would say that was the average profile of the male Pillar Point refugee. During the daytime he was a construction worker and at night time, a drug abuser. But that's a generalisation, but they definitely would have gotten the money from that kind of job.

Many of them were involved in buying and selling drugs. So some of the nastiest individuals I have ever met were running gangs in the camp. They never touched drugs themselves. They had everybody do everything for them. And when they left to be resettled – and they were resettled, because their records were clean because they never touched the [drugs] themselves. And I remember one particularly nasty individual going to Australia, and I'm sure he is doing similarly nasty things in Cabramatta, or wherever he is. And we had to help him to go to an ATM and get his money out, ready to resettle. Because he had to take his cash out on the lorry when he was sent to the airport. And we literally had to stand by the ATM as he unloaded his cash, and he had hundreds of thousands of dollars. So there was a lot of money involved in this.

One of our residents in the camp was eating at a noodle store in San Sri Po in the middle of the day, and he was shot dead from behind from a guy who came out of the blue. And apparently he was wearing a white suit, an assassin, who walked up from the crowd and shot the Vietnamese in the back of the head at the noodle store then disappeared. But there was that kind of incident, that kind of severity of incident was rare, but nonetheless, that shows you the sort of violence that was going on related to the drugs. So it was a difficult and very complicated situation on numerous levels. And I had no idea when I set out to take this on that it would be that difficult or complicated. And I had a very... I'd like to think that my motivation was right. It was to go and help people whom I thought needed help. And I think at the end of the day, they did need help, many of them. But I had no idea what I was getting myself into.

**I: Your experience on both sides, and both times, were totally different from one another.**

JG: Very different. The remnant population, by the time I had gotten involved the second time, was very different to the population I worked with the first time around. Although, you could see that there were signs that might happen. One or two quite violent individuals in Chi Ma Wan as well. So you could see that if they opened the camp and allowed people to go [outside]... things could go [badly]. Although the motivation was right, to try and get people to go outside and get jobs and such, there was always the danger that they were going to end up on the wrong side of the city. And that's what happened, in many cases.

**I: What did it mean to you at the end?**

JG: It meant a huge amount to me at the end. I had an experience of a lifetime, really. And I mean that. I mean, I had a wonderful time doing it. We had a lot of fun in amongst all this. You had to laugh, just to keep your sanity. But we had this wonderful – as I said – multicultural team speaking all these languages. So putting them all together and working with them was a lot of fun. And it was wonderful to see people like Huong who came through that in a way that she wouldn't have done if we wouldn't have been there. I think she might have died [if we hadn't intervened]. And she does probably agree with that.

So those things made it all worthwhile, and made it feel wonderful to [accomplish]. And it was a wonderful experience too. And it made me look at the UN and NGO's and Government Security Bureaus in a totally different way to how I would look at them normally. And I understood the politics behind all of this, which I hadn't understood before. And I think I went back to Cathay and Squire with a lot more management experience than I ever would have had, had I done something different those past two years. So, it was an incredibly meaningful experience.

**I: Would it be fair to say that the challenge kept you going?**

JG: Yes, definitely. It was a daily challenge, and it was a challenge of trying to go out there and make something out of it. And make something better for people there than would have been the case if we hadn't been there. And that was sort of the daily challenge. And it was a lot of fun, as I said. I remember one story. I remember the security company that provided us with the Gurkhas, when we originally invited them to come and do a survey of the camp before they decided to commit themselves. So I hosted them with some of the others. And they brought their Senior Gurkha with them and they walked around the camp, then came back to the office afterwards and sat down.

And I said to the Senior Gurkha – his name was Nam Seng – I said to Nam Seng, 'so if one of the Vietnamese got very violent as you were trying to check their ID cards, how would you cope with that?' And he said to me, 'well

Saab, I think I would take him into the Security Control room and sit him down, and ask him if he would like a cup of tea'. [Laughs]. That's how they were all the time, very polite. And their Manager who was a former British Army [person] himself who came to do the survey was very worried about the dangers to the company if it all went wrong. So I had to try and persuade him to commit the Ghurkhas, because without them we wouldn't be able to do it. And he couldn't understand how it was all working. He didn't understand about the open camp, so he said 'let me get this right. You've got baddies on the inside trying to get out, and you've got baddies on the outside trying to get in?' [Laughs]. He couldn't get his head around what was happening.

**I: It is really complicated. I am trying to understand and see how things unfold through documents and material, but when I hear people tell their side of the story and what they witnessed and experienced is just unbelievable. I never knew how complicated it was here, because in Indonesia, Thailand and Malaysia, there were also hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese boat people as well but under totally different circumstances.**

JG: I think Hong Kong – in my view – deserves a lot of credit. I don't know much about what happened in Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia and other countries but I do know that generally, the experience of refugees in Hong Kong was better than what happened in those other places. And they were generally given shelter, and not pulled back out to sea. And taken in, and ultimately, many – if not most – were resettled. So I think it would be fair to say that Hong Kong, overall, did a good job.

**I: When people mention 'Vietnamese boat people', what comes to mind?**

JG: Resilience, I think is the first words that comes to mind. They are incredibly resilient and resourceful, whatever they were doing. You know, whether they were good people who were genuinely suffering, they were resilient in the way they went about their day-to-day [tasks]. And the people who were doing the drug-trading were incredibly resourceful and skilful in the way they managed to avoid the police and avoid getting into trouble. I think they were sheer resilience and resourcefulness. Those are the words that I associate [with the Vietnamese boat people].

**I: Were you glad you got involved [with the Vietnamese boat people]?**

JG: Yes. I was glad I was involved. I was glad I was able to turn the place around. I think we were acknowledged as having done that [being a positive influence], so I was very glad to have done that. That meant a lot.

**I: I take it that it was a meaningful part of your career?**

JG: Definitely. Squires [company] still ask me everytime I see them, whether I regret going to do it or not. And I always say I never regret that. It was a great thing to have had the chance of doing. That's the story really.

**I: Is there anything else you'd like to add?**

JG: No, I think that's pretty much the full story. Thanks for listening.

**I: Thanks for sharing.**



## John Fortune

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Interviewee: John Fortune (JF)

Interviewer: (I)

6:00PM, Friday 13 September 2013, The T Hotel in Pok Fu Lam

**I: Mr Fortune thank you very much for giving me this opportunity to interview you. For the record, could you please state your full name, your date of birth and where you were born please?**

JF: My full name is John Alfred Fortune. I was born in the UK and came to Hong Kong with the military in 1950, having been through the Military Academy. I was offered a job as an overseas civil servant with the Hong Kong Government in 1950. So I worked in Government House with Sir Alexander Grantham, as he was known then, and I worked there for three years and then in many Government departments.

**I: What year were you born?**

JF: I was born in 1929, so that makes me 84 years old today.

**I: Could we start with your experience with the Vietnamese boat people. When and where did you start to get involved with them?**

JF: Ok. I better give you a little bit of background, because I am also outside of Government. I am President of the Hong Kong Underwater Association. It was Federation, and as such, I am a very keen scuba diver. And a good friend of who I used to go scuba diving with, suggested that we should go down to Vietnam to do some scuba diving. I agreed, and so he arranged it all, and so we went down by Air Vietnam to Nha Trang – 400 km north of Saigon, as it was then – and we did some diving there. It was very interesting; we went all down the coast all the way down to Cam Ranh Bay. He then had accommodation where we were staying, and I was staying there with his friends. And they were three ex-‘agents’ – which was a bit strange. They had all been in Vietnam, they had fought in Vietnam and were living there and they were divers too. So I dived with them and got on fairly well with them.

And there was an American Consulate, also in Nha Trang, and they suggested I go to the American Consulate and have a few words with them. And when I was there [at the American Consulate] I met a General Pham, and he looked like a very worried South Vietnamese General. It was either ‘Pham’ or ‘Phu’. And he asked me if I knew what the situation was like here – this was in March, towards the end of March in 1975. I said I didn’t know, but he said he could tell me. He said Buon Ma Thuot has been surrounded for many months and is about to fall to the North Vietnamese [soldiers]. And the road from Buon Ma Thuot to Nha Trang has been cut, so it’s out. And he said that ‘my advice to you is to leave as soon as you can’. So that was difficult, but I managed to get a flight out of there from Nha Trang, which was the head of the Green Beret, the Americans when they were there. I got a flight on Bird Air, which was a pretty old CIA plane that was overloaded [with passengers] because they were taking all their friends and contacts out with them. So I got on and sat more or less with the pilot, because there wasn’t anywhere else to sit. And we flew to Tan Son Nhut in Saigon. And I knew then that I would have to leave as soon as possible. I was lucky; I managed to get a flight on Air Vietnam to Hong Kong.

**I: What month was this?**

JF: Almost April. And the General had warned me that Nha Trang would fall in about two or three days’ time, so that is why I had to get out.



**I: Do you remember the dates?**

JF: The dates are all printed in this book here. This is a very good book in fact, how Vietnam was liberated – I have given you a copy of the front.

**I: So, to go back to your involvement with the Vietnamese boat people in Hong Kong, when did that start?**

JF: Well, so far, I flew back and in Saigon at that time, people were very agitated and crowding to get onto boats. So when I got back to Hong Kong, I immediately went to the Security Branch and went to see the Secretary for Security – Mr Bim Davis – and said to him, there would probably be a lot of boats coming into Hong Kong and we needed to be prepared for them, just in case. I said that in Saigon, it was chaos; Saigon fell I think two weeks later. He said to me that I'd better set up some camps in case we did have an invasion of people coming in from Vietnam. So I agreed, and asked where I could go. He said there were a lot of empty military camps in Hong Kong. So I went around and had a look at the Sai Kung, the empty camp there; Chatham Road – there was one, but it came later; Double Ridge, opposite the Fanling golf course had another empty camp.

So I took my staff out and asked if I could have permission to spend Government money on setting up these places. We had to reconnect water, sewage, electricity and put wire up so the people were ok but inside. I had to arrange the feeding which was organised by the Government. I trained up some of the CAS into looking after the human side, human element of refugees coming in. I then flew off to the Philippines because I was also the Chairman of the Hong Kong Motocross Racing Team, and I took fourteen motorbikes over with the riders. No sooner had I arrived in the north in Vigan [of Philippines] that I got a call from the Ambassador, saying, 'please return to Hong Kong immediately'.

Luckily, I was staying with the Mayor of Vigan – Everesto Singsan – and said to him that I had to go back. He said that [there was] the whole curfew in the North Philippines, but he gave me his car and an armed motorcycle escort and I got back to Manila that night and then back to Hong Kong. And lo and behold, I was just in time because the first big ship with the Vietnamese [boat people] – the Clara Maersk – was arriving. So I was back in time, and unfortunately, Joseph Pham – who can't be here as he is in China at the moment – I picked him to be my permanent staff member, to be in charge of that camp. We had gotten all the volunteers lined up to be in the Civil Aid Service. The Civil Aid Service is a uniformed, disciplined volunteer organisation.

They [the Vietnamese boat people] were landed in Guangzhou in the container port. And we said they were going to Sai Kung – not Saigon, where they had just come from. They [the Vietnamese refugees] were all from the South [of Vietnam] – this time; and they were all fairly happy to be in Hong Kong. They were a fairly mixed group. We had some who were very rich, some not so rich and quite a few from the girly bars and so on; because as you know Saigon had a lot of those. But we didn't have any Northern Vietnamese refugees this time; they were all from the South. So we had peace and quietness. That was 3,750 refugees on the Clara Maersk. That was a lot of refugees.

**I: Did they have to go through the Princess Margaret Hospital first?**

JF: No, they came straight through and we put them inside our camps. Inside the camps, we had CAS doing the perimeter controlling and control, and the AMS were in there as well looking after the medical side of things. But we didn't have any particular problems with them, and as it [the camp] got fuller and fuller, Chatham Road was used – as well as another – camp. Then, my thing was that we should encourage the various consulates to come in to do the interviews of the people [refugees] so they could be sent overseas to some of the other countries. And it was interesting because we called in the various consulates; we called in the Americans first because they were responsible for a lot of the trouble.

This book really lays down why they lost the war. After that, the Americans took in all people who had been associated with them in some way or another – working in some of the agencies and so on. The Australians said they would take some – they took quite a few, but the Australians wanted artisans; plumbers, fitters and so on. You could see that different countries wanted different things. Then after that, the French – being French – took in the girly bars and some of the really rich Vietnamese.

This was the only real trouble we had. One of the leaders of the families had a solid gold leaf waistcoat, and I wouldn't allow any of [those types of things] to enter the camp because it would undermine our authority. He was given an order to surrender his golden waistcoat and it would be put into deposit in the Hong Kong Shanghai Bank, and it would be kept there until he leaves. It wasn't a very popular idea with him, but I said it was the only way. If he didn't do that I said I would put him in the little prison-style container room where we could keep [the refugees] – we

had one of these in each camp. So eventually he gave up his waistcoat and was put into the Hong Kong Shanghai Bank and he eventually got it back I suppose. But back to the idea of calling all the consulates in; the Canadians too came in and they wanted lawyers, solicitors, qualified people. The Australians were taking the artisans [from the Vietnamese refugees], the Canadians were taking the more qualified people and the Americans were taking those who had been associated with them. The British were slow off the mark; they took nobody at all really at the beginning. So we gradually over the year got rid of the 2,700. And at the end of the first year we were left with about 31 [remaining refugees] who were absorbed into [the population of] Hong Kong by the Government.

People were still arriving, but not in the proliferation in which they had come when it was first announced that Vietnam would be under the North control [control of North Vietnam]. A year or so later, the Vietnamese Government started to crack down on ethnic people in the south. And this caused in 1978 another flood of boat people. We still had the camps going, but this time the boats came in their hundreds and it was very difficult to know what to do with them. Initially, all of the boats were put into typhoon shelter, but it was obviously not a suitable place to keep them; you have some photographs and you know what the boats were like. It was so overcrowded [that] we couldn't keep the people on the boats, so we put a large penny bay – a large pontoon that was sixty feet by forty feet – which was anchored there.

All the boats were taken and put around the pontoon, and the water was located over towards the Disneyland, that was part of Penny Bay. What happened then was that as the boats came in, they would be brought up to the pontoon, interviewed, recorded and so on. The Civil Aid Service would feed the Vietnamese people at night, because it was so hot during the day, that we would call them boat by boat. And we had one hundred boats out there – it was really incredible. And we would call them up one by one, feed them, and water them and so on. And then send them back out again. We would get through the whole lot in one evening.

This was in June 1979. I was very concerned because June was the beginning of the typhoon season, and with all these small boats coming and being anchored off the islands of Penny Bay, we would have a lot of trouble if there was a typhoon. So I said that the only thing to do was to bring the people in. I had found, then, in Yamada that there were some very big, old warehouses, known as 'go-downs' in Hong Kong. And I said that if we could use these 'go-downs', we could load the people into the 'go-downs' and we would give them a mat or a bed and so on. Up to this point, the CAS had no trouble with internal fighting or anything like that. And we put them [the refugees] inside the 'go-downs' and their boats were taken over by the Government and destroyed. And that was part of the policy. So it caused the Yamada go-downs to become over-full eventually. So we looked for other areas – by that time we had set up the camp at Dogwood Ridge next to Fanling golf course. Lai Chi Kok at the end of the Kai Tak runway; there was a feasibility on the east end of having the refugees. But we did have a lot of camps and it became critical because they were coming in at a faster rate than the Hong Kong Government and the CAS could possibly cater for.

Then the Government policy changed and they started to publish notices and broadcasts to Vietnam saying that the chance of you [the Vietnamese refugees] being resettled elsewhere was becoming less and less. And in fact it was. The countries were getting tired of taking so many people, so what happened then was that these broadcasts were being made and the North Vietnamese were trying to stop it to a certain extent. So then we set up the policy of 'closed camps'. One of the closed camps was at Chi Ma Wan, which was a Correctional Services Prison. And David Wilson, who was the Governor, asked if I would go over there because Lord Howell from the UK was coming and I had better see him because he was doing a lot of work on behalf of Hong Kong. That would be in the late 1980's.

So I went over, and we went around Chi Ma Wan, and I took him across to Green Island where we had set up a holding wing, or holding camp. It used to be an old Government ammunition depot and it was abandoned, but we put people into there because we were worried about the bubonic plague and other contactable diseases [spreading]. And we didn't want that coming into Hong Kong. And he came across [Lord Howell], and on the boat going over, David Wilson asked me if I had any idea what the answer to the boats coming from Vietnam was. And I said that it [the problem of the boats coming] had to be stopped at source, because by the time they come here, it's too late.

So if they can be stopped at source before leaving Vietnam, which would be ok. And Lord Howell was in fact on the way to America, and he said that when he was there, he would have a word with the North Vietnamese to see if he could get them to try and stop people coming over. And so that was then, and I think that had a certain amount of effect and gradually eased down a bit [the numbers of refugees arriving]. We were still running lots of the camps, but it wasn't just us running the camps. The reason we didn't have much trouble in our camps was because I told my staff, when they had the refugees coming in, they must be divided into Northern and Southern Vietnamese, because the Northern Vietnamese could cause trouble and cause fights. So we separated [them] as far as possible when we knew they were coming; North in one part and South in another.

I also told my staff that they must listen to what the Vietnamese had to say. So each hut should have [something

similar] consultative council, and the CAS managers who were my permanent staff, should meet with them once or twice a week from the representatives in each hut, to listen to them. And in this humanitarian way, we could solve a lot of problems. It seemed to work, and I'm pleased to say that in the CAS-run camps, we didn't have much fighting. The Police didn't quite have the same idea; they had a camp in Sai Kung on the airstrip and there was a bit of trouble there. The Correctional Services had another one on High Island and they had a bit of trouble too. But [given] we had more of a humanitarian aspect; we could look at their problems, help them as much as possible and solve the issues. So the last camp I set up with my staff was at Argyle Street.

Before this, we had moved the people from the go-downs in Yamada, because they weren't very comfortable. And it was a difficult time because the Queen was visiting [laughs]. And there we were in May 1975 at the height of it all. But we managed to move a lot of the boat people. We moved them into Kai Tak – don't forget I'm thinking back to 38 years ago so some of the dates may not be the same – into the old Mary quarters at Kai Tak from the R8 Royal Air force. They needed a lot of renovations and doing up, but they were ok and it all went very smoothly. That gave us a little bit of freedom and another empty camp if we wanted one. Now Argyle St was a military camp that was empty, and so the last load we really had was the Argyle St military camp area which was set up.

In each camp, I had at least one permanent staff and one or two other permanent staff members. But the rest of the disciplined, uniformed people were all CAS volunteers and we had great cooperation – which we always do have – from employers in Hong Kong. The employers in Hong Kong gave us the backing and the CAS volunteers get a nominal amount of money; because if they are going to lose by not being at work, so it's very nominal. Argyle St was successful, and we're now up to 1989. I retired from the Hong Kong Government in 1989 and went to work as the General Manager at Clearwater Bay Golf and Country Club.

**I: During this time, what were your most memorable moments or incidents that stick in your mind?**

JF: I used to go around the camps most frequently, and the thing was, we didn't have any trouble with the Vietnamese people. They were a peaceful people. We didn't have, or I didn't give them the double-bunk beds because what they would do was take them [the bunks] to pieces and use the iron supports as weapons. We put them [the bedding] onto matting, and so on. We had lots of matting and luckily it was warm. And that was ok.

We did set up one camp, which was a problem. This was on the Sai Kung military airstrip. It was a problem because – I don't know whose decision it was – but they had set up tents. And during my junior days of Government, I had been the administrator for the [local area]. And I knew that Sai Kung in June [season] flooded.

Immediately I heard they were going to put them under tents on the airstrip and I said, 'Wow, this is terrible'. And lo and behold, in no time they were flooded. And I was told to immediately move them [the tents] and I said, 'where can I move them to?' And I was told there were some nissen huts in the middle of Hog Kong Island Central; which used to be empty then. So I agreed, but there was no water, electricity, nothing. But we had a lot of cooperation from the Public Works Department. Within 24 hours, they had managed to reconnect everything. And we managed to move all of these Vietnamese into the area of Chatham Road, into the centre and it worked.

**I: What's a 'nissen' hut?**

JF: A nissen hut is a military, rounded hut. There are two types; there's the 'nissen' hut which is the smaller one for soldiers and people to live in. And then there's the 'romney' hut which is the big one for storing goods and whatever military stuff. The camp in Argyle Street huts were mainly romney huts, the big ones. Most of the others were nissen huts, the military huts. So it seemed to work; having a humanitarian approach in looking after the Vietnamese and listening to what they had to say in a humanitarian way; and also trying as hard as possible to get them settled overseas. England did eventually take some [of the refugees] and they were settled in London. A friend of mine was an ex-police officer and ran the camp in London. So they did take them, but these were not very fit people. They were the last of the groups. Then after I left in 1989, it gradually tailed off. I think the last group in the camps closed in 1990.

I was fortunate that when I finished as the General Manager for Clearwater Bay, I worked as a consultant to an adventure travel agency and one of the things they asked me to do was to go to Vietnam to see North and South Vietnam; to see whether [Vietnam] was suitable to take tour groups from Hong Kong. So I went with another guy and we went to North Vietnam, and I looked at some of the golf courses and in Hanoi we had a wonderful reception. The thing with Vietnamese people I found was that they are likeable, and easy to get on with. So we went from Hanoi to Hai Phong, and I wanted to get back to Nha Trang but I couldn't get back there. And we went to what is now Ho Chi Minh and looked around. And I took a tour by myself to Da Lat in the mountains to the golf course up there.

**I: I'd like to ask you, since you spent fourteen years with the Vietnamese boat people, what did the experience mean to you?**

JF: Remember I told you at the beginning that I went to the Military Academy, which is a year and a half – it's like a University but for military training. They teach you all kinds of things, and really when I was handling the Vietnamese camps and people; it was the first time after my military training that I was able to humanise with the people. And I found that with the people, they were very 'human', I got along very well with them – I used to attend meetings with them – and by looking at their problems and trying to work out the answers, they appreciated this. So the fourteen years or so I was helping to look after Vietnamese was thoroughly enjoyable in a way, except I was sympathetic with the people.

And the other thing was, I was happy to be able to go back to the North of Vietnam in 1992 to travel all the way down, and visit Ho Chi Minh City and I went to Cuu Chi Tunnels. I went underneath to search and up to the border of the Cao Dai area, and I went to visit the Cao Dai Church and cathedrals and we had a wonderful time with no trouble. It was a great shame, but it seems now to have settled down. I would like to go back but I'm getting a bit old now.

**I: Is there anything else you would like to add or is this enough?**

JF: I think the information I have given you, some of it is a little bit conflicting. But the CAS publication that I prepared when I was in-charge there is a good publication. And it covers the aspects of this [issue]. Also, before I retired in 1989, in 1988 I was asked by the United Nations Disaster Relief Organisation if I would go to Geneva to lecture to the Undro people. So I went, and asked how many people were there. I was told 100 or so. And I asked how many nationalities but they didn't know. So when I arrived, there were 350 people and 35 different nationalities. And I gave them a lecture on the way the CAS operates. And they were quite amazed that you could use ordinary civilian people in uniform with discipline, and put them in charge of projects like this. Because the CAS did all kinds of things; mountain rescue, aircraft crashes, oil pollution at sea, house collapse, typhoon duties and everything you could think of. They were very busy. I was asked to lecture in London and again, I was put in charge of a whole syndicate including a Chinese syndicate that was a part of it. Again I lectured in America to FEMA – the Federal Emergency Management Agency; not in Gettysburg, it's a city near there; and again in California and in Hawaii. So a lot of lecturing and I put forward the CAS which was very rewarding because I think we have a very good system here. The CAS has over 4000 adult volunteers and over 2000 cadets. The cadets come from the poorer families and are first of all taught discipline then they are taught a trade. They are a little bit different from a boy scout, but they are uniformed and disciplined and they did have help from the adult-side as well. I was glad in a way that we had the opportunity to look after Vietnamese people in a humanitarian way. And I think my men and ladies – because we had about 800-900 ladies – who did a very good job. There were a lot of problems, but it was successful.

**I: I am a boat person, and I was a refugee in America. And on behalf of the Vietnamese boat people around the world, I would like to personally thank you and your staff for what you have done for all of us.**

JF: I am very honoured to meet someone [like you]. How did you come?

**I: I came by boat to Indonesia in 1979, and we were left stranded on an uninhabited island in Indonesia. It was the jungle with nothing around.**

JF: No one looked after you?

**I: No. So initially we lost about 300 people and they were buried throughout the jungle.**

JF: I'm sorry to hear that. It's a pity you didn't come north to Hong Kong. We would have looked after you.

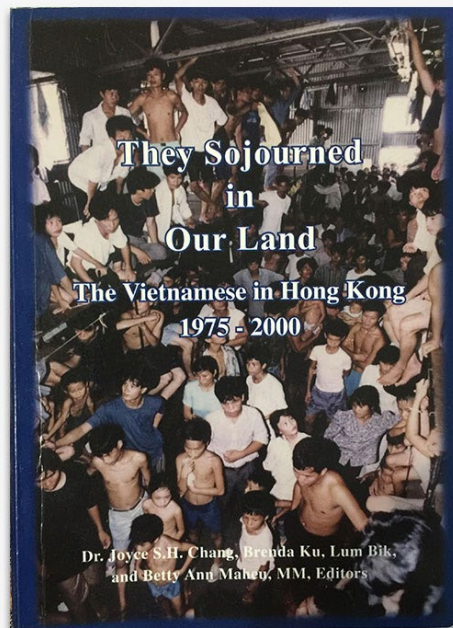
JF: Vietnam is a beautiful country, I like it very much. I like the people and I also like the scenery. I think the war was a terrible shame. It was a pity, if it could have been sorted out peacefully that would have been ok. I pray they have now gotten the peace they deserve.

**I: I hope so too. Thank you very, very much.**



Dr. Joyce Chang

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2:50pm, Sunday 6 January 2013, St Pauls Convent, Hong Kong

**Interviewer (I):** Dr Chang, would you please state your full name and where and when you were born?

Joyce Chan (JC): My name is Joyce Chang Sau Han, and I was born in Seychelles, not in China. It's a long story. But I had been to school from kindergarten onwards in a Catholic school in Hong Kong.

**I:** And what year were you born?

JC: 1941.

**I:** Thank you. I'd like to ask you a few questions about your experiences with the Vietnamese boat people who came to Hong Kong at the end of the Vietnam war. Can you please tell me when and how you started to involved?

JC: In 1975, I was the Professional Assistant to Caritas Hong Kong. And so we are the biggest and main Catholic agency working with the poor people in Hong Kong. So of course when we heard the news about the Vietnamese people coming to Hong Kong, my boss asked me to see what we can do to help. And also, we received several 'telegs', or telegrams. At that time, there were no mobile phones. So it was mainly from telegrams [that we received our communications]. We received telegrams from Caritas Germany and Caritas Switzerland, Caritas Spain and all the European [branches] and also from the United States' Catholic Charities that mentioned to us they were willing to support us, as long as we were the nearest place to Vietnam. So we should go and see what we could do to help Vietnam and the Vietnamese people. At that time, I was Head of all the Professional Services.

Mainly we [provided] social services for families, youth, children, handicapped people etc. So I took the liberty to contact the Director of the Catholic Agencies in Saigon, who was an American Priest. Anyway, I contacted him, and he said it's difficult to say so much in the 'telegs'. And that I'd better come and see what I could do. So, together with my boss, we decided that one of us should go and have a look and see what we could do. And I think the European Caritas had indicated that if there was a need to take care of the orphans from Vietnam, they would be willing to provide backup support. But, we tried to see what we could take in terms of 'quick action'. The rest of the needs and support they would continue to provide us with the backing. So together with a French Convent Sister from St Paul, the two of us took a plane to Saigon to see what we could do.

**I: When was that?**

JC: The end of April, 1975.

**I: And what were you able to accomplish during that trip?**

JC: During that trip, we visited the American Priest there. He took me to two or three orphanages. But I remember that at that time, two of them were going to close down. One of them, I remember was run by 'The Good Shepherd' Sisters. And the Agency there and the priests arranged a car to take us to all the places [we needed to go]. And in one day we completed all our trips. And then the sisters in charge asked me, 'which one I would like to take? [Meaning the children]' I said that I would like to take whichever ones were available. Because when I had pointed out to several of the children, they had already been [adopted]. So I said those children who had nobody to take them, I would take them.

And there was this one small boy who came to peep under the sister's skirt, because he was curious what was inside the sister's long skirt. And I took the little boy and held his hand, and he continued to want to look under the skirt. And so I took that little boy and said if no one wanted to take him, I would take him. [He was a] little, naughty one. So I managed to take seven of them. But most of them were 3-4 years old. The only girl was 7 years old. And the youngest one wasn't walking yet. We had to hold him. And he was about 1 year old. But he had something wrong with his eye. I could see a white film on his eye and he couldn't see. And I asked the sister what had happened to him, and they said that maybe some flies had dropped some dirty things into this eyes that had made him partially blind, I think. So it seemed that he wasn't taken, so I indicated that we would take him with us.

**I: So you brought seven children back to Hong Kong?**

JC: Yes, together with the Sister.

**I: How long were you in Saigon?**

JC: Four or five days. And the Father (the Priest) managed to complete all their papers before we left. And he had the car arranged to take all the children to the airport. And the Sister and I at the airport were waiting for them. And we took them together.

**I: What happened when you took them back to Hong Kong?**

JC: I had already told my staff that if we came back in five days' time, they would need to arrange a place for the orphans to stay. And luckily we had a hospital for the children - [that is] the children's ward. We put them there for the first night. And they were well-fed and well washed [laughs] upon arrival. Because we came back in the evening, so after feeding them, they all went to bed. And the next morning, I was up there to see [them]. And of course the Sister Matron had arranged everything. And immediately, we had check-ups for all the kids. Even when we looked at their papers, it wasn't written how old they were. It was all guess-work. So one of them, I think, the paediatrician had to check them out to say how old they were from looking at their x-ray. They found out their age [that way]. So from



there, we estimated the age of each child.

**I: Did the children know that they were taken out of the country?**

JC: Yes. They were happy to come with us. And they had such a good time on the plane, because they had food to eat that they hadn't seen in many years. And I remember the little one – the youngest one – was one to one and a half years old. And we kept on feeding him with only milk, because we weren't too sure if he could swallow things. And the Sister was trying to... because it seemed as though he didn't know how to [swallow]. And he was crying on the plane because he could see the others were eating and he didn't have any food, just the milk. And afterwards, the Sister said she couldn't manage this little boy who was crying. So I said, 'let me try' and I grabbed him. And I saw him looking at the others eating. And so I used a spoon and I took some food from the other children to feed him. And he grabbed the food. So apparently he could eat solid food. So I told the air hostess to give him a big portion. And he refused to have the spoon. He was feeding himself with his fingers. So I realised that he was older than what we thought, that he could be more than one, one and a half years old. Or close to two years old. It was just that he was shorter than the others.

**I: After the examinations, what happened next?**

JC: After one week in the hospital, we put them in a nursery. I found a place in Caritas in Han Ho where on the upper floor, there was a vacant space. So I put all six of the children there. And then there were two Sisters living on that second floor. So the two Sisters were foster carers for the six of the children. And during the day time, they would attend the nursery on the ground floor. So it was a good arrangement. Every Saturday, I would take them out to the surrounding area to swim and walk in the park and things like that. And after six months' time, it took us that long to arrange overseas agencies in Switzerland. Two of them were arranged to go to Holland, Netherlands. Caritas Netherlands took them. And four of them [went to] Switzerland. And the youngest one was immediately adopted by a couple in Hong Kong, who were going back to Germany. That helped us because at that time, he was the youngest one not running around like the others. So this couple left within six months to Germany.

**I: Do you hear about them? How they were doing?**

JC: Only those from Switzerland. I heard about them. They are doing fine, they all completed secondary education and are working. Except one, who had a drug problem. [That was] the little peeping boy. He had a drug problem.

**I: How was the one who went to Germany?**

JC: No, Switzerland. He's very handsome looking. But then, he quit drugs. The mother told me they had a hard time. But the mother was very supportive to him. And then he requested the parents to send him to South America for treatment. And he stayed on a farm for two years and really quit drugs. And then he returned back to Switzerland to work.

**I: And that was the first group of Vietnamese people you assisted through Caritas?**

JC: Yes. Personally, I was also involved. But the others, we went in hundreds and hundreds – the programs we arranged [for them]. First of all, we arranged relief work for them. For example, when they first arrive, they need diapers for the children or clothing for the children.

**I: You mean the Vietnamese boat people? Do you remember the first time you assisted the first group of Vietnamese boat people in Hong Kong.**

JC: Yes. There was a Military Chaplain organising the Nepalese military soldiers to take care of a few hundreds. I don't remember exactly – about 200-300. In Fan Ling. And in the first week, we went to get children's clothing, milk powder, things for the kids to play [with] and to keep them occupied for the first week.

**I: What year was that?**

JC: 1975. That was even before the UNHCR started their office here. I don't remember when they started their office here, but it was before that. We were working directly with the military chaplain in Fan Ling. That was the first group. And then afterwards when the UNHCR came, we had other camps in Kai Tak airport, in Wan Chai (Harcourt) and also in Sam Shui Po area. Then afterwards, [there were camps] in the factory houses in Fai Leong. Caritas was the one



agency that started to help them from the beginning, until the end.

**I: So that's about 20 years?**

JC: 25 years. And we were also the main agency to help the UNHCR to put in all the Vietnamese families data to apply for them to be resettled abroad. And we handled about 125,000 families.

**I: You were with Caritas the whole time, these 25 years?**

JC: Yes. Caritas seconded staff to the UNHCR office to work with the Vietnamese. But at that time, our staff couldn't speak Vietnamese. So I requested the religious Vietnamese speaking Sisters and Priests to go and help in each of the camps. So every Sunday, for those who are Catholic, they have mass. [They held mass] every Sunday in the refugee camps. And the Sisters go on weekdays to teach them English and act as interpreters also.

**I: What were some of the services Caritas provided for the Vietnamese boat people?**

JC: Relief work, giving them material goods, organising volunteers to teach them English, work with the women, sometimes even Health Education, family planning and things like that. Then at one time, we were allowed to conduct schools for children under 12 years old. So we had nurseries and schools. But later, the International Social Services did all the schooling and we only [taught] the women and the nursery, the health clinic and the elderly. And community development projects, because when Government built the camps for them, we went according to the 'street'.

So in each street, we determined how many housing units [there were], and we had group meetings with all the leaders so as to involve them to run their own camp. I remember at one time, we had many donations of goods, like for Christmas we had ice-cream and some additional things. We would inform the Vietnamese they had these things, and let them distribute it by themselves. But we discussed with them how to do it. And we asked the Vietnamese leaders to do the distribution. So not everything was done by the staff. So in that way, we had the cooperation of the Vietnamese to handle their own things.

**I: What were the birth rates among the Vietnamese boat people at the time? I heard it was quite high.**

JC: It was quite high. Medical and clinics were being done by the Government. We weren't asked to handle that.

**I: How many staff did you have [in general] to assist you with your work?**

JC: Different times, different numbers. The largest number at one time was close to 100. But normally, it was less. Because I had a team working with the UNHCR on all the family dossiers for resettlement, [and] then we had volunteers teaching English. Then we had pre-employment skills training for the young men to prepare them to go overseas. It all depends, at different times we had different skills and different people. And also we had staff to do the camp management.

**I: Was Caritas, at that time, involved in other projects outside of the Vietnamese boat people? Or did this always occupy your time?**

JC: No, we had others. I still regularly ran other projects like family counselling. We had the largest in Hong Kong. We are in 10 or 12 districts. Each district has a family service centre. Each district has a community centre that works with the local people. So we have other things [going on].

**I: Did you find working with the Vietnamese boat people challenging?**

JC: Very challenging. And I think I also grew up with them, because it was right... I started to work with Caritas in 1969. And six years later, the Vietnamese boat people came. So I grew up with doing service [for] them. And then, I also had to take part in overseeing conferences. For example, the Commission of Catholic Migration Service, that worked with migrants. I was one of their Council Members, so ... how I became a Council Member was because I was asked to report on all the works that were being undertaken in Hong Kong to help the refugees.

So I was first introduced to that group for this purpose. And after that, they invited me to visit the first settlers going

to Brussels. I was there in the morning when the first group were going to Brussels – there were about 100 of them. And I remember, listening to them getting down from the plane. They said, 'It's like an ice-box here', because it was very cold when they arrived at 6am or 7am in the morning. 'Like a refrigerator' [laughs].

**I: What month, or season was that?**

JC: That was May. Because usually [the Commission] have meetings in April or May. Because I was reporting about our situation in Hong Kong [to the Commission] – [for example] how we helped [the Vietnamese boat people] and what our difficulties and problems were. And the President of that Commission said, 'would you like to come to Brussels and tell us how we should work with the refugees?' And I said yes, but I needed to apply to go there, because I held a passport from the Seychelles, not a British passport. So I had problems with visas in certain places. So he said he would get me a visa to go. Because apparently, Belgium is a very open country and you can easily get a visa at the airport, even. So he said he would get me a visa and a ticket to go there. He said it wouldn't take me too much time, just a few extra days. And it happened that was the day the Vietnamese from Hong Kong [the first group] was arriving.

So I went to see how they were doing, because when they were in Hong Kong, we were trying to get rid of their lice from their hair. And also, some of them were holding the medicine while they were going there [to Brussels]. Because I know that when they did [their medical] check-ups, there were problems with worms in their intestines. And I said that these people needed [medical] follow-up. And those who had TB, also they recovered, they were under medication and needed to continue their medication in order to control the disease. So I took them some of these things that we saw in Hong Kong so that they could follow-up. And they were very grateful I was there to help them because they had no idea how to follow-up.

**I: And of course the language barrier?**

JC: It wasn't so bad, because the first group of re-settlers in Brussels could speak French. A lot of Vietnamese can speak French, because they were working with a French company or an American company. That's why the French-speaking group could easily be resettled, and the English-speaking group could easily be resettled in America.

**I: What year was that, the first group that went to Brussels?**

JC: I think 1976 – '78. Between those two years.

**I: I mean the time you went to Brussels?**

JC: Yes, that was '76-78. About that time, I remember. Because the ICMC had meetings every two years. So either '76 or '78 I was there to speak to them about this. But of course the first group of settlers were more competent and skilled people. They had been working under French companies or English-speaking companies, so they were easily settled in the first line for the first few groups.

**I: Over the years, working with the Vietnamese boat people, what were some of the difficulties that you experienced?**

JC: Of course, in the beginning it was language. But later we were able to get some Vietnamese-speaking people from the community. Because Hong Kong was so strict that we had Vietnamese-speaking people who had settled in Hong Kong years ago. And then, of course later when people from the farming groups came, we were unable to help them. We had difficulty in helping them because Hong Kong is mainly urban and they came from a rural area. And there was a gap [for them] to fit into their career or work experience. I found at that time, that was the difficulty.

Then the other difficulty was we didn't know which country would take which group of people. We could easily start language-training for them as early as possible, but we didn't know whether, for example after learning German, Germany would take them? It was completely out of our control, which country would take what kind of people. So the main language classes we conducted were mainly English or French. We didn't dare to teach so many other language classes because we didn't know if they [the respective countries] would take them.

**I: Did you ever think it would last that long?**

JC: No we didn't. We always thought it would last two or three years. But it lasted 25 years. It's almost one generation.

**I: What were some of the most memorable moments for you?**

JC: I think it was in the beginning, because they were freer, because they weren't put inside a camp. I remember even in Sam Shui Po, in the English military camp at that time, it was very near our centre. We had a centre [there]. The elderly centre there closed at 6 o'clock, so we could easily conduct classes, like cooking classes, or whatever kinds of classes in the evening for the Vietnamese refugees. And they were very happy, they could do cooking. For example, we had some 'exchange' or 'fun fair' days where the elderly would cook certain things, and the Vietnamese would cook Vietnamese egg rolls for them. And they all enjoyed [together].

And there really was no barrier between the Vietnamese and Chinese. It was like a family, where during the Chinese New Year, we had all kinds of food and it was all mixed where each group would provide different kinds of food. It was really like a big family, that even the local people weren't resentful of the Vietnamese people at all. It was only when we started to put them into camps that people started to say, 'these are camp people, these are not ordinary people'.

**I: When did that start?**

JC: 1982. I remember we started to carry our Identity Cards that year. And then the Vietnamese had to carry their papers, stating that they are 'Transient Residents'.

**I: Looking back, after working with Vietnamese people for 25 years, what did that experience mean to you?**

JC: It meant a lot because I used all of the skills I learned in Social Work in all kinds of aspects. We also had to advocate for the Vietnamese in front of the Government, arguing why can't they have schools? Because they couldn't attend our local schools, I said, 'why can't they have a school within the camp?' I was really not afraid of anything. I was arguing for the Vietnamese to have schools, clinics and the right for doctor's consultations when they needed them. But there was a problem when the Vietnamese committed some [crimes] like burglaries, or [exhibited] violent behaviour towards other Vietnamese in the camp.

Then there is a problem, because it's beyond our imagination how to handle them. Then the Government just put them in prison. Although it solved our problem, it was a problem for the Vietnamese themselves, because after being in prison, they couldn't go abroad [to be resettled]. It was a vicious cycle, you see. We had a lot of things to learn from day to day problems. And we had to face the media, and sometimes we had so many visitors to the camp. I remember twice I was in a helicopter with a Bishop to take them to see the Vietnamese camp situation. And I was thrown in doing PR and getting funds from them, and writing reports to justify our use of their funds. And all sorts of [laughs] work I never dreamt of. I was just thrown into that work.

**I: 'Diversify' was an understatement.**

JC: Yes.

**I: Do you have any regrets?**

JC: Oh no regrets at all. In looking back, I think I enjoyed the work more than any regrets. I couldn't think of anything to regret, except, once I think I was very stern with my staff. I told them they couldn't behave that way towards the refugees. I don't remember what it was, but that girl must have remembered, because she was crying on the phone. But I forgot what it was about – it must have been something serious. But I don't remember really.

**I: Thank you very much. On behalf of the Vietnamese refugees and myself, I thank you for your good heart... Is there anything you'd like to add?**

JC: No.



## Kathleen Malone

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Interviewee: Kathleen Malone (KM)

Interviewer: (I)

**I: The time now is 2:35pm. It's Wednesday afternoon, January 9, 2013. I am at the Lady Recreation Club in Hong Kong. Thanks for meeting with me. May I please have your full name?**

KM: Kathleen Malone.

**I: When and where were you born?**

KM: I was born in London in 1943 of Irish Immigrant parents.

**I: How long have you been living in Hong Kong?**

KM: I have been in Hong Kong since the late 70's, for about 35 years.

**I: What brought you to Hong Kong?**

KM: We came because my husband is a landslide expert and Hong Kong suffered with a lot of landslides and deaths as a result.

**I: Have you stayed here since?**

KM: We have stayed here since, and my husband has now left the Government whom he worked for and now works for the Hong Kong University.

**I: When did you first get involved with the Vietnamese refugees?**

KM: Very soon after I arrived, somebody – I cannot remember who – asked me if I would get involved with some teaching. I am a qualified teacher. So I agreed and got taken over to Sham Shui Po refugee camp. And we had a connection through the Catholic Church, through Mother Theresa's group. And they took us in and we setup teaching on a roster basis with our adults who were prepared to give some time.

**I: How long did you teach at that refugee camp?**

KM: That particular one must have been about 2-3 years. And then in 1980, I had another child – a third child – and after that, I went back with some more teaching, other the auspices of – I think it was UNHCR in those days – we taught at St Johns Anglican cathedral. We brought the children out and taught them at the Cathedral. It was a nice trip for the children, and it was convenient for us not to have to go to Sham Shui Po.

**I: What was it like for you when you first started teaching the refugees?**

KM: The conditions in the camp in Sham Shui Po were very difficult, because there was a constant noise of loudspeakers blaring almost the whole time we were there giving announcements, messages, calling people, telling them what was going on. And the weather seemed to be particularly rainy that time. And so the noise of the rain on

the metal roofs and the loudspeakers made it very difficult to teach. But of course we persevered. And I still suffer from loss of upper range voice which I lost at that time, trying to sing and speak over that noise.

**I: How many hours a day did you teach there?**

KM: We used to do 2 or 3 hours of a few afternoons. Then simply we started with very small children, because there was nothing for toddlers. Basically we were just keeping them occupied. Of course they came with their mothers or somebody. Then later we started to do slightly older children, primary school children. We tried to give them a little bit of help with English. We also spoke to the parents about how they should try to adapt in a different climate, because of course one of the things was, they weren't used to the cold. And they thought if they put on one thin jacket, they would be fine. Whereas we were trying to teach them that layers were better to trap the air and such like.

And so Cathay Pacific gave us, in Sam Shui Po, a mock-up of an aeroplane because they had a terrible incident where the plane had taken off and a little old lady had gone to the back of the airplane and lit a kerosene stove to cook up her rice. No one had told her she'd get a meal on board. And they suddenly realised that these people knew nothing about flying. So that was the incident where they [Cathay Pacific] gave us a mock up [airplane] seat and we taught them how to get on board a plane, tie themselves up [with seatbelts], taught them about the wash basins and told them about what happens when you get on board. And you don't have to cook [laughs].

**I: A mock-up airplane? That's interesting.**

KM: Yes. We used an old container, one of those ship containers, and they set it up inside with a couple of seats and seat belts and things.

**I: Were there any difficulties for you?**

KM: For me personally, I didn't really find it difficult. I really enjoyed what I was doing because I loved teaching. Of course it was physically very difficult and it was also quite tiring because I had young children. There was a little bit of ill-rest in the camp. We could only take so many children of course in the space we were given, and there was a bit of fighting going on as to who was going to bring their child in and who wasn't. And I do remember one or two little incidents where women were fighting to bring their children into the class. It was quite hard.

**I: So then how would you solve that? Was there a roster?**

KM: We did have a roster. Some people did mornings, I did the afternoons. I'm really not sure if everybody got to come in. We left that part to the camp to organise themselves. But generally speaking, it was quite peaceful. We had little incidents where the children would steal everything. Anything we bought for toys, pencils, paper. But of course we needed to reuse them; we couldn't let them have them. So we used to search the little children, very discreetly as they were going out. And take little bits of lego, or pencils or any small thing they wanted. Of course they wanted something.

**I: I'm sure there were up sides to it. You stayed there for a couple of years, so what kept you going?**

KM: I met some really lovely families who suffered terribly. One family was a family of eight children, a father and a mother. The father had paid for them all to go – in pairs, on different boats – so that some of them would survive. Fortunately, all of them survived. Most of them arrived in Hong Kong. One or two of them arrived in other places. I think one son and the daughter-in-law and their child ended up in the Philippines, but eventually the Red Cross helped them all come together. And eventually they all ended up in Hong Kong, although some of them were in different camps. But that was wonderful for that family.

And another family who had been in the Huey Fong and had spent years out in the jungle in Vietnam because, had four children and a mother and a concubine mother who they looked after. The father was telling me at one stage how he had carried his elderly eighty-one year old mother onto the boat. They ended up on the Huey Fong which was one of the boats where the refugees had to live on for six months. It was the Skyluck, sorry. They had to live on the boat for six months because there was just no space in Hong Kong.

And the young people pulled the anchor up and it [the Skyluck] drifted into one of the islands. And then they all hopped off. Of course, he said there was no way he could get off with two old women and four children. But they eventually survived. He was a man who was very well-educated. He spoke five languages including French,

Vietnamese, Mandarin, Cantonese and English. And he was an interpreter in the camp. And [he was] a lovely man. And we invited them to come spend Christmas with us and they did. And we had a good, fun time.

**I: That sounds wonderful. I just want to share your memories. What comes to mind? Some incidents or happy moments?**

KM: One of the happy moments was Christmas time, when after they were ready to go home, the father said to me that he had never seen his wife laugh and smile like that for about 5-8 years, because they had nothing to make them smile. The children had never been to school, even though the eldest was eleven. And he just said it was wonderful to see her laughing and smiling. It was terrific. It was mixed with sadness, when I got invited by the other family to come to the camp and enjoy tea with them. And they invited me in, and took me along to the bottom level of the bunk bed they lived on. And the father said, 'welcome to my home', which touched me terribly. And they were so resigned and accepting of it all. And looking on the positive side [of things] it was really lovely.

**I: Did you ever have to deal with those who were repatriated?**

KM: I never dealt with anybody who got repatriated, but one incident was when the man who spoke all the languages who was the interpreter in the camp got accepted to America. But his mother had a shadow on the lung, so they wouldn't accept her until she had the treatment. So he said they couldn't go then, they had to all stay and he was persuaded by the Authorities to let his concubine mother go. And they said, if you don't claim her as an old person with no relatives, she would go very quickly. Which he did. And she went off in three weeks to America, and was apparently ok. She was 81. Off to America with some of the others. It must have been frightful for her, being elderly and separated from the family. But it all worked out and they found out she was ok, and they would go [to America] eventually. There are so many interesting stories aren't there.

**I: What about the students?**

KM: The students were just like any other students really. I think little kids just accept life [as it is], they accept anything. I didn't deal with the older children who must have had more problems. But certainly, this camp only had young children as far as I could see. The little children were just like any children. They loved the singing, they loved the drawing and painting. And we took them into my ex-school which was opposite St John's Cathedral once, and they spent a day at the school with all different age groups and classes. And those children just mixed in, you know. Some of them were pretty good at 'rounders', and things like that when we had sports. And it was lovely to see them mixing in and being just like other children. It broke your heart to think of what they had gone through, but you always tried to be like the Vietnamese who were always looking on the positive side, I found. People I met certainly did. They always looked on the positive side, and that they would survive.

**I: What did your family think about you doing this?**

KM: My children didn't mind too much. They were a little bit cross when I gave a lot of their toys away. They still to this day say, 'you gave my favourite toys away'. But children in Hong Kong have so much you know, that was deprivation for them.

**I: And did you ever bring your children to the camp to meet the Vietnamese?**

KM: Yes, one of my sons I brought to the camp once, when he came home for the holidays. I brought him in to help in Mother Theresa's camp. But they didn't allow young children to come in, in those days, so you couldn't bring in young children. And I was a little bit frightened in the '80's, when I had my young daughter, in case she caught anything. As you can imagine, all the illnesses were travelling around very fast in those days, although our children were well inoculated. There was a little fear that I might bring something home. The only thing, I didn't get the nets unfortunately. I had very long hair back then which I kept very well tied up. I did get a little bit of scabies which was treated very easily. That was all.

**I: How old was your son when you brought him to the camp?**

KM: He was about eleven or twelve.

**I: How was it for him?**

KM: It was quite an eye-opener for him. He was actually... I have to admit it was actually a punishment for him. Although he had been interested in coming, he had been very naughty. And I had said to him, in that case he had to do some charitable work in the summer holidays. So he came in to help – to do whatever was necessary. [Laughs]

**I: Did you and your son talk about that experience?**

KM: Not terribly. I haven't spoken to him much. He actually works in Vietnam now, which is quite interesting. He goes there quite a lot. He wants me to go, as I have never been. He wants me to go and see the place that I was quite attached to at one time.

**I: Perhaps you should, you will enjoy it.**

KM: We had some big business people who were very good. One of the men who ran the Tobermore Newspaper Company used to give us all the off-shoots. In those days, it was the big computer pages, and he gave us all the old paper that wasn't right. Tobermore is quite a large company. And they gave us the paper for the children to draw on, because the children didn't have anything to draw on [at the time]. Those bits of paper would have cost a lot. It was easy to round up pencils and crayons and things, but not lots of paper. It was a very good use of their old paper.

A lot of people were kind and donated toys and things for us to use in class. And books... although books weren't that useful because the children couldn't read English. But they could look at pictures, so that was fine for children. It's bringing back memories for me when I think about it. I've got some stories from the Vietnamese refugees themselves who told me what had happened to them in Vietnam. To make them come on the boats and such, and when they landed, I know one group who landed tried to land in the Philippines and got shot at. They just turned around and came to Hong Kong where we accepted them. I always feel that the Hong Kong Government was pretty good about that. I know that other people may have other stories, but I thought they were pretty good and accepting where they could. And, we were quite a crowded nation anyway.

**I: And the second time you came back, what camp was that?**

KM: The second time was with UNHCR. And it was organised by – I'm not sure the man, he was from a Lutheran church – and we actually brought the children out of the camp by coach. And they came with a very nice young Chinese, Vietnamese man who had been training to become a doctor. He had only done about four or five years of his training, but he was fairly knowledgeable. So they brought him – or he came with the children – in case anything went wrong, or a child was sick or anything like that, he could help. And he came from the family where I said they put [all the family members] on different boats. A lovely family. What one of the things the interpreters did for me – after we had the Christmas time together at our flat – was to ask me if he could invite a Vietnamese chef who was in the camp so he could cook. So he brought the Vietnamese chef to my house and the chef spent all day preparing food which I couldn't really help him much with. And he made us a wonderful meal, which was a very nice gesture, I thought. They had nothing, you know they didn't have any money. They wouldn't take any money for it. But they, on principle, they wouldn't take anything for it. A very proud people, I think. They were very proud. They didn't have their hand out for everything that was going. They were just lovely people.

**I: How many of you volunteered to teach at that time?**

KM: The first group was quite a big group. I think this was organised with Mother Theresa's group. And people were very enthusiastic. I don't know if maybe the enthusiasm waned a little bit, after the years when they kept arriving. But the second time, we had about a dozen women – mainly women, I think it was all women in those days – who would go in either mornings or afternoons to go in and do teaching or something or the other. They weren't all qualified [teachers]. But they brought their experience and their help to the little children. We had all small children in that camp. So that was... I think the bigger group was the first group. And that was overseen by a Lutheran church, I think. I just cannot remember how I first got involved. I've been trying to think about it, where it was that I first... I can't remember.

**I: So your husband didn't mind?**

KM: Not at all. He used to say, 'that will keep you out of mischief'.

**I: With four children there can't be much time for you?**

KM: No time for me, with four children. I had stopped teaching at that time. I taught when I first came. And in those



days, I was able to go in the afternoons to teach at Sam Shui Po. But then when I was pregnant with my daughter in 1980, I stopped teaching for a few years. I didn't go back for a few years so I had a lot more time. We were very lucky; we have a full time amma who used to help. She was also very good. She was a good friend [to me].

**I: What did the experience mean to you?**

KM: Well, of course one can't help but be emotionally involved with all these people who have terrible stories, tragic stories. My parents had been Irish and that wasn't a particularly painful thing, but I used to think about the Irish people who had left Ireland and gone to Australia and America at the times of the potato famine in the mid-1800's. And I thought it must have been a very similar thing, although they went on a boat journey on a big boat that catered to people. They couldn't afford the proper accommodation on board, so they would go in steerage down at the bottom of the boat. And a lot of people died on the way there. And you would pick up all sorts of diseases and everything. And I sort of associated that with the Vietnamese problem. I just felt that we had a lot.

We had come to Hong Kong, which was a struggle to survive in Britain. But we were both professionals. We didn't have a lot of money left over, but when we came to Hong Kong, we had good money and good accommodation. So I thought, 'we had been so lucky', maybe we could give back a little. I'm also a Catholic and believe in charitable works, and giving back and giving unto the least. But I did get very emotionally involved with people and wanted to do more than I could for them. I really enjoyed doing it, because I liked teaching and I enjoyed it. Unfortunately as I said, I lost my upper range of voice and I can't sing now, which I used to do quite a lot. I suppose it's a small price to pay. And I would love to know what happened to the families I was close to. I've lost contact with them and I would love to know what happened to them. Who knows, I might be able to eventually find out what happened to them. They were lovely people.

**I: Well Kath, thank you very much. Is there anything else you would like to add?**

KM: No. It's just very nice to pick up on somebody who has been successful. That everything has worked out despite all the miserable times you probably had. And it's nice to meet up with somebody again, from that era, even though you didn't come to Hong Kong.

**I: Well I hope we can meet again.**

KM: And I will do some research for you, to help you.



## Lam Yu Lai

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Interviewee: Lam Yu Lai (LL)

Interviewer: (I)

12:00pm, Wednesday 9 January, 2013, Officer of Correctional Services Department, Hong Kong

**I: May I please have your full name?**

LL: My name is Lam Yu Lai. You may call me Larry. I am now the Superintendent of the Human Resources Section of the Correctional Services Department.

**I: Where were you born?**

LL: I was born in Hong Kong.

**I: What year were you born?**

LL: 1962.

**I: When did you start to involve yourself with the Vietnamese boat people?**

LL: Actually, I joined the service in 1983. Since then, I worked in the prison and during my encounter in the prison; of course I encountered people of different nationalities including Vietnamese. But in 1992, I was posted from the prison to a unit which was called 'Escort Unit'. This changed its name to be 'Emergency Support Group'. The duty of that group was mainly escorting prisoners from penal institutions to various places such as Court, such as Hospital and attending visits or transfers etc. And the other duty of the group is to handle emergency situations of the department. And it happens that the group was assigned with the duty to handle emergency situations in any place. Of course that included the detention centre, which detained the Vietnamese refugee boat people. Starting from 1992, I began to get involved in the emergency operations in the detention camp, handling Vietnamese boat people.

**I: What was your position at that time?**

LL: I was then a Principal Officer. Who was essentially performing the duty of Platoon Commander. A platoon of about 30 staff members [I was in charge of].

**I: And how long were you in that position?**

LL: I was in the Emergency Support Group for more than 6 years.

**I: When you finished, was it at the end of the Vietnamese situation? Or were you transferred to a different post?**

LL: Yes, I was transferred out of the Emergency Support Group in around 1998. I was then posted to Victoria prison. I took up the post as the Security Officer of the Victoria prison. Coincidentally, Victoria prison is a – I can say – it was the final station for Vietnamese detainees. Because that was the place where Vietnamese prisoners were finishing their sentence and would be transferred to Victoria prison, pending their repatriation back to Vietnam.

**I: What were some of the crimes they committed?**

LL: Drugs, fighting, robbery etc.

**I: Were there high numbers of the Vietnamese refugees in prison?**

LL: I don't have the exact figures on how many Vietnamese prisoners were in the penal institution, but usually not the majority of course.

**I: In your career life, before your posting to the Emergency Relief, and after that, how would you compare your job?**

LL: It was different of course. Because in prison, I would perform the duty as a Custodial Officer who was responsible for running the routines of the prison. But when I was posted to Emergency Support Group, I would be in charge of a platoon to deal with the emergency situations, initially in the detention camps. That was the difference. Because I think my responsibilities were [heavier]. When I was in charge of a platoon, I had to take care of the members placed under me. Their safety [and] their psychological conditions. Because usually in our operations, we have a start[ing] time to work. But we don't have a time to finish our work. It may last for twenty or more hours. Of course we have a short break during that time [to compensate] for the long working hours. But under those working conditions, during [an incident] that happened unexpectedly, suddenly, I had to take care of [my staff] both physically and psychologically. I considered myself to have a very heavy responsibility.

**I: Would you say that during that time it was more eventful? More emergencies?**

LL: We had emergency situations to handle, but I may say that it was definitely not an easy time. The time was hard. In terms of the long working hours. In terms of the situation we faced, in terms of the possible violence we faced, in terms of the possible legal responsibilities. If anything went wrong. In terms of my duty, my responsibility on the client, on my staff, that kind of pressure, of course you can imagine I did have a lot of pressure. But it gave me a very, very good experience and memories. That kind of experience and those memories, I will never forget. Even today when I am together with my staff, we talk [a lot], we recall much on the experiences and encounters we had. That was a memorable experience I can say.

**I: What were some of the experiences you can remember right now?**

LL: I remember I took part in many, many emergency operations. I remember once, it was around 1994. It was the 7th April. This was the first repatriation operation in Whitehead detention centre. It was a joint operation with Correctional Services Department and assistance from Police. We encountered resistance from the Vietnamese boat people. That operation was for the extraction of the target for ordered repatriation. We encountered resistance and at that time, we were receiving force and resistance from the Vietnamese boat people. And eventually, more than hundreds of tear gas and grenades was fired from Correctional Services Department Officers and Police. Eventually after that operation, there was demand from the public. And the Government appointed an independent inquiry on that. Then, we would enquire every Commander, including the High Commander and the Platoon Commander.

We were summoned to an independent enquiry. And we were questioned. We gave all the details on what had happened, and how we had carried out our duties. And this made me have a very unforgettable experience. That is a kind of a pleasure on us, on how we carried out our duties. And so that gave me an experience that we have to be responsible for everything we have done, how we planned the operation and that made me to think about – as a public officer – we are responsible to the public for what we have done. The use of force. And there was only a thin line as to how you can use force. The level of force was it appropriate, excessive or non-necessary. All of these things came up to my mind.

**I: Where did the incident take place?**

LL: It was in Whitehead detention centre.

**I: About what time, do you recall?**

LL: The operation started in the morning. It lasted the whole day.

**I: Could you describe to me some of the scenes or how it broke out?**

LL: I was a Commander of a platoon. Then I, as planned, I had to control certain hubs. And just when we went in to the position, then we encountered resistance from the Vietnamese boat people. We had stones thrown at us. But everything just stopped at that time. Then we didn't fire any tear gas at first. Until I received [the] command from my superior that we needed to go in to get people out. And I remembered the situation dragged on the whole morning.

**I: So the resistance came from the people in the camp in general, not necessarily the ones being taken out?**

LL: Yes. Because we can't even go in to get the 'so-called' target[s]. We were not supposed to identify the target. But we had to assist the staff of the camp to go in and get the target they wanted. That was our job.

**I: And then in the end, were you able to bring out all the targets?**

LL: I remember that we were.

**I: And the operation took a few hours?**

LL: Yes.

**I: And how were the targets being taken out?**

LL: I remember after the situation was under control, the camp staff came in and they got the targets.

**I: And eventually, was that group transferred to Vietnam?**

LL: I remember yes.

**I: And then, that operation stopped for a while for everybody to recover?**

LL: Yes.

**I: That's a big learning curve I suppose.**

LL: Yes.

**I: Was there any moment when it was harmful or risky to you?**

LL: Many. I remember... I don't remember the year... It was in another operation in High Island detention centre. Which was around the Chinese Lunar Mid-Autumn Festival, I remember. At the time, we had around 200 staff members of our group, divided into several platoons. I was one of the commanders of one platoon. I remember at that operation, we had around 51 staff members – of the 200 staff – being injured. Because of the operation.

I remember the scenario when I let my platoon go into a hut to disperse the people staying inside the hut. I was hit by an orphan with burning charcoals. Yeah. Luckily, it was brought by the edge of the door and not directly on my head. And the object just went through and slipped on my body. Luckily we had some protective gear, the uniform which was fire retardant. I just got burned on my hand. That was of course not the only one time I was injured, but that was a very unforgettable memory to me.

**I: What happened? Can you describe to me the scene of that incident? How long did it take to contain [the situation]?**

LL: It was only for a few seconds when we were about to enter the hut to get the people out. And somebody ambushed us [from the rooftop].

**I: But the operation was carried out anyway?**

LL: Of course.

**I: How many of those operations were you involved in, approximately?**

LL: I think more than 20.

**I: Did you ever feel like you don't want to go to one of these again?**

LL: No, no. First of all, this was our job. This was our duty. We had to do it. As I said, it was hard times. It was not an easy job to do. It was not an easy duty, but we still felt honoured to have taken part in that duty. Because even today, we stayed and gathered together on a few occasions every year with the staff I worked with at that time to recall the experience. It is enjoyable.

**I: Any pleasant experiences during those years?**

LL: We had a group of good colleagues. They are creative, starting from the training and those going to the field and those carrying out emergency operations. We have created a 'team spirit'.

**I: So that was what kept you going?**

LL: We had friendship and brotherhood together. Because we had the experience of facing hard time together, like working long working hours. I can say that the time I stayed with my colleagues was even longer than the time I spent with my family. That was the game. The working experience.

**I: How did that kind of work affect you and your colleagues psychologically?**

LL: I don't think there would be any negative psychological effect on us. Instead, that experience built up our confidence, our skills and technique in handling violent people and emergency situations.

**I: In regards to the Vietnamese people, what do you think of the people when you carry out those duties?**

LL: We treat them as people, because they deserve respect from us of course. Just because our position is different...

**I: Did you feel sorry for them when you had to return them?**

LL: I sympathise with them. That's what I can say. Because that is the situation at that time. The Hong Kong Government can't keep them indefinitely in that place. After the screening process, some of them will have to return.

LL: Because of the different position, to me they are the same, they are people.

**I: Do you make any friends with the Vietnamese people?**

LL: No I did not.

**I: Was that because of the nature of your job, you can't establish long-term friendships with the people?**

LL: Yes of course. We have regulations on that.

**I: Is there anything else that you might want to share?**

LL: I think that's it for the time being.

**I: Would you say that the experiences that you had working with the Vietnamese people then was useful in your career and working in other jobs [you have had since]?**

LL: As I said, it was a very, very good experience for me. Especially in handling emergency situation and build up our confidence and experience.

**I: But I'm sure none of you would ever wish to have to do this again?**

LL: Of course.

**I: When you hear the term 'Vietnamese refugees' or 'boat people', what came to your mind?**

LL: They are unfortunate people. Because of something happening in their homeland. I don't think anyone would like to leave their homeland, even for political or economic reasons. No one wants to leave their homeland. We have a saying in Chinese that, 'people leaving their homeland would become cheap'. That is definitely true.

**I: What does 'cheap' mean?**

LL: It means 'valued less'.

**I: Was that the only time you were majorly injured?**

LL: Actually, it was not comparatively serious, not a serious injury. We had protective gear. Luckily, none of my staff were seriously hurt.

**I: That's good, I'm glad to hear that. Because I read through records and research that there were casualties.**

LL: It was very low [numbers]. Even on the Vietnamese people's side, there were no serious injuries. Except those who caused self-harm. I witnessed once that the Vietnamese people just jumped from the [top] of the hut. I saw it. I encountered one. He had multiple fractures.

**I: Did he die?**

LL: No, just fractures.

**I: And about how old was he?**

LL: Middle-aged.

**I: Did he talk about it, did he say why [he jumped]?**

LL: No. Just as a gesture or protest against something. At that time, nobody was going to do anything [for him]. He just jumped from that height.

**I: What time of day did that take place?**

LL: It was daytime, in the afternoon.

**I: Did he do it purposely, so the Officers could see him?**

LL: We were just around, doing our operations.

**I: This was one of your operations?**

LL: An emergency operation procedure.

**I: Was that what you would call an 'emergency operation', every time you would go in to escort the detainees?**

LL: We don't usually call it an 'emergency operation'; we usually call it an operation depending on the nature [of the operation]. Sometimes we would just do an extraction to just get people out. For repatriation, if we were just doing 'repatriation' we would just call it a 'repatriation operation' or 'repatriation exercise'. Because for some of the targets we would escort them to the airport. Just to the aeroplane. And then back to Vietnam.

**I: And also to prison, or Court?**

LL: And sometimes we were summoned to the detention camp because of disturbances occurring in the detention camp. And at that time, we would just handle the disturbance. It all depends on the nature of the incident.

**I: Were you shocked when you saw that man jump off the roof?**

LL: Yes, actually. But luckily we had medical staff just [nearby] for immediate medical attention.

**I: That was really sad. So he just stood on the roof... did he yell out or scream or try to get anybody's attention?**

LL: No. He just jumped down.





## Dr. Lee Shiu Hung

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2:45PM, 9 September 2013, School of Public Health at the Chinese University of Hong Kong

**I: Dr Lee, thank you for the opportunity to interview you. For the record, could you please state your full name, your birth date and where you were born?**

Lee: My full name is Lee Shiu Hung; my [surname] is Lee. I was born in China, but in the old days, there was a free movement of people. When I was very young, I left my home country in the Guangdong Province and came to Hong Kong because my father made arrangements for myself and my mother to come to Hong Kong. And that was before the Japanese occupation, before the Second World War, I came to Hong Kong. I completed my education in Hong Kong.

**I: What year did you come to Hong Kong?**

Lee: I think it was around the 1940's, because the Second World War was from 1941-'45. Hong Kong was under the Japanese occupation for 3 years and 8 months. I was a child at that time, but I stayed in Hong Kong during that period. After liberation, when the war was over, I studied my education in Hong Kong. My Middle School, University

and afterwards I started to work in Hong Kong.

**I: What year were you born?**

Lee: I was born in 1933. Now it is over 80 years.

**I: What year did you start to become involved in the Vietnamese boat people situation?**

Lee: Now I cannot remember exactly [when I became involved with the Vietnamese boat people] but the 1970's was a period of influx of Vietnamese boat people. I still remember one morning around Christmas time; I was working in the Headquarters of the Medical and Health Department. And my boss, Dr Jerome Choy – he was the Director of Medical and Health Services. That morning we were having some Christmas party celebrations, and then he asked me to go to the Central Government Office to attend an urgent meeting. I asked him what the urgent meeting was, but he told me to 'go up and see'. So I had to rush out to the Central Government Offices to attend the meeting. Now, the meeting was a high-powered meeting involving the Heads of [several] Government Departments and the Secretaries. The meeting was held at the basement of the Central Government Offices because of the high security [required]. I represented the Department in attending the meeting. The subject to be discussed was 'Vietnamese boat people'. Now Vietnamese people at that time... there was a boat [that had arrived in Hong Kong] known as the Hue Fong, from Vietnam. They arrived in Hong Kong waters, but the boat wasn't allowed to enter Hong Kong and had to wait for [further] instruction from the United Nations for clearance. This was because it was the first time a boat with several thousand Vietnamese refugees had left Vietnam because there was fighting between North and South Vietnam.

The people from South Vietnam had left their home country by boat and arrived in Hong Kong waters. So we had to wait for instruction from the United Nations as to whether or not Hong Kong would be the first port of call. We had to prepare in case they were allowed to enter Hong Kong. So I attended the meeting to prepare [for the situation] in case the boat was allowed to enter Hong Kong. Given that I represented the Medical and Health Services, the first question was on the concern of public health and infectious diseases. Vietnam was well-known as an endemic area for plague. Plague is a highly infectious disease, starting from a rat and spreading to human beings, resulting in an epidemic with high mortality. And then we were afraid that if [the] plague was introduced into Hong Kong, there would be a disaster because Hong Kong is very densely populated. And then we would have to be careful in how to prevent the introduction of plague in case the refugees were allowed to enter Hong Kong. I represented the Department [of Medical and Health Services] and at first we had to consider theories in clearing the refugees of suspicion of infectious diseases. Now the boat at that time was floating in High Island in the southern part of Hong Kong Island, in the high seas. So how could we do the inspection and disinfection [of refugees]? It was not easy, because the boat was floating around and you couldn't just [board] the boat because there was no pier. At that time, [given that this was a medical emergency] I asked my boss, the Director of Medical and Health Services Dr Jerome Choy, about mobilising medical services – including doctors, nurses etc. – to inspect the boat, refugee inspection, disinfection and so on. Moving the medical personnel onto the boat was a big question, as was finding doctors and nurses to undertake this special assignment. However, in Hong Kong we have a very important medical department known as 'Auxiliary Medical Services'. The Auxiliary Medical Services (AMS) Department is a department where the members are volunteers, trained in first aid, emergency [services] providing medical and health services in times of emergency. So I thought of the AMS, however I wasn't the Commissioner of the AMS. The Commissioner of the AMS was the Director of Medical and Health Services. So I telephoned Jerome Choy, saying that with his permission, I would like to mobilise members of the AMS to go to the ship to undertake the inspection and disinfection. So Dr Choy gave me the order to call the AMS. This was very important, as even though I could call the members of the AMS to go onto the ship, the question was 'how' they would [board the ship]?

It wasn't easy because the ship was floating around on the high seas, only using a small boat to get on there and the AMS members wouldn't be able to climb up onto the big ship to do their work. So I thought about using a helicopter [for the AMS members to board the ship] and I had to seek approval from the Commissioner to use the Auxiliary Air force. We used the helicopter, and through the helicopter we [flew] the members of AMS from Aberdeen. Aberdeen is a southern part of Hong Kong Island. We started from Aberdeen, and used the helicopter to take the AMS members to the island. From there, using a rope they are dropped onto the boat. Now this was very dangerous, however AMS [members] are very loyal and faithful so they were dropped by rope onto the boat. From there, they undertook their inspection, disinfection and everything [else required].

**I: What was your position at that time?**

Lee: I was Assistant Director of the Medical and Health Department. Now these are the pictures I kept... [Shows photos to Carina of the Hue Fong and Vietnamese refugees on board the ship]...

The whole night the AMS [volunteers] carried out the disinfection [processes], they helped women to deliver [their babies] on board the ship. Now this was highly risky, and then throughout the night I received telephone calls from [concerned] family members of the AMS [volunteers]. Some would ask, 'Dr Lee, how is my husband?' I would respond, 'your husband is safe but he can't return home'. [Laughs]

**I: Do you know how many AMS members there were volunteering at that time?**

Lee: I think several hundred? Then, the next day, we received direction from Whitehall, the United Kingdom that Hong Kong would be used as a first port of call for Vietnamese refugees so the boat could enter Hong Kong waters. So the instruction was received in the morning [from the UK], and the next day the boat entered Hong Kong waters. The boat then went to the Kwai Chung container terminal. At the Kwai Chung container terminal, we used a ferry for the refugees to unload themselves and get onto shore. So here you can see the AMS members helping the refugees get off the boat onto the shore. Once the refugees were off the boat, they would be taken to hospital; [at] the Princess Margaret Hospital. Princess Margaret Hospital was opened at that time; the first patients [at the hospital] weren't local people – the first patients were Vietnamese refugees. There, they underwent medical examination again. After everything was [found to be] alright and the refugees were cleared, they were allowed to go to the refugee camp at Chi Ma Wan. You know that Chi Ma Wan was on Lantau Island? So from then onwards, every day you would have thousands and thousands of boat people coming from Vietnam in Hong Kong waters.

[This was because] Hong Kong was the first port of call. So I had to make sure that these refugees weren't bringing in infectious diseases; not just plague but others like tuberculosis, malaria etc. And then the refugees were kept in the refugee camp. We had to set up refugee camps in the outlying islands. Now I had to make sure that if they [the refugees] got sick, there would be medical care [available for them] at the refugee camps. We had to use AMS members again, because our 'normal' doctors and nurses had a lot of work to do in the [other] hospitals. So we had to use Auxiliary Medical Services (AMS). Now you can see, from ten of us, I had to use a helicopter to go to the outlying islands to [conduct] an inspection of the refugee camps. [Shows photo to Carina] Now you can see me using the helicopter... and then to the refugee camps. Now the refugee camps were managed by the Correctional Services Department. The Assistant Director accompanied me to go to [undertake] the inspection. We had also set up medical clinics; I had to go to see the medical clinics. All the AMS members carried out [treatment] for when people were sick and provided treatment. This [happened] every day. And then in order to make sure that the boat will not bring in rats from Vietnam, later on we used an island [speaks Chinese] opposite Kennedy known as 'Green' (Ching Chao) island. Are there still houses on Green Island? Then we moved the refugees into these houses and kept them there for six days. Why did we keep them there for six days? Six days is the time taken for the incubation of the plague? If after six days they were not sick and were [feeling] alright, we could allow them to go to the refugee camp. But for the first part, they would stay there for six days and we would do the disinfection and cleansing and so on.

Green Island was like a quarantine island for the refugees. Then [as for] the boats, some of them were wooden boats and may have had rats. We were not sure [about whether or not the boats had rats], but if the rats came onto shore it would be very dangerous [for the Hong Kong population]. So to make sure that the rats weren't brought into Hong Kong, we moved the wooden boats into a channel and burned them. This was to make sure there were no rats there. Once they were in the refugee camps for a long time, we would have to undertake inspections, provide medical care and support, food and lodging etc. We put up refugee camps in many parts of Hong Kong in the new territories. Even in Central [Hong Kong] in Sai Kung, [we had refugee camps] because we didn't have enough [space]. We were very afraid of another disease; Malaria. Then we moved the people to Sai Kung refugee camp. [This is] because if a mosquito bit a refugee and then bit one of our local people, this could spread [the] malaria disease. So we had to [undertake] an anti-mosquito campaign, DDT spraying and we had to take smears to see whether or not the refugees were suffering from malaria. So these were some of our concerns.

From then onwards, we had many places where the Vietnamese boat people were kept [in refugee camps]. Later on, they could come out to work and so on [from the closed refugee camps]. Finally, this problem was settled. My concern was because we were from the Medical and Health Department; our job was to prevent highly dangerous and infectious diseases from entering Hong Kong. So we had to make sure that we could provide medical care, surveillance and so on in the areas. The other concern was to take care of others with babies, in providing them with [appropriate] medical care in delivery and so on. This was part of our responsibility.

**I: And how did you do that? Did you bring them into the hospital for deliveries?**

Lee: Yes, we brought them into the hospital for delivery. We also had to work with the UNHCR, because we were short of staff. At one time, the UNHCR made use of Medicine Sans Frontier (MSF) from France who had also come to help. [This was] because we had so many refugee camps and we didn't have enough [assistance] we had to find other personnel [to assist].

**I: Did you find any infected cases from Vietnam among the refugees?**

Lee: We did find some outbreak [of disease]; malaria was one of them. In the [outlying islands] we had mosquitoes spreading malaria so we had to be very careful. [We also found outbreaks of] cholera. But through our surveillance program, we were able to contain the spread [of disease] so that it didn't explode. All the refugee camps had medical centres with disinfection [services and so on to stop the spread of infection]. This was why I had to go there [to the refugee centres] to undertake inspections. The other thing was food supply. [Another issue] we also had upon the refugees' first arrival was when some of them had passed away and then their bodies couldn't be detected. Then we had to undertake a special enquiry into the situation. [This was] because the report in the end was cleared, without any mistakes so we had taken care of everyone. It takes time to identify which particular refugee went into which refugee camp. I think overall, the departments involved were the Medical and Health [Services], Correctional Services and Agriculture and Fisheries to make sure the local mosquitoes wouldn't be spreading infectious diseases. The District Offices in the new territories [were also involved]. We also had to help the people with communicating with the outside. So we had to use a lot of staff which placed additional stress and burden which lasted for quite some time.

**I: So you had medical facilities set up inside the camps to assist the refugees?**

Lee: Yes.

**I: And in some cases they were allowed outside the camps to hospitals?**

Lee: It was to require admission into hospitals for the refugee patient to go to hospital. A lot of these were maternity patients. A lot of people didn't dare to go into the refugee camps, so some staff wouldn't like to work there. It could be rather risky inside the camps.

**I: Were you afraid they would be held hostage inside the camps?**

Lee: Not held hostage, but the language and communication was difficult. So far, the refugees were overall cooperative because they knew that we – and our AMS members – were there to help them, and also to feed them. Some mothers [for example] would need a special supply of food for their babies and so on. So we [generally] worked closely with the refugees and didn't have much opposition because they understood we were there to help them.

**I: Was the birth rate high?**

Lee: Not high, but surely because there were so many families we had to make [relevant] arrangements.

**I: How were the pregnant women cared for during their nine months of pregnancy?**

Lee: We had doctors there [at the refugee camps]. If an actual delivery was necessary, we would make arrangements for this birth to take place in a hospital. The clinic and supervisory [services] was a very good way of surveillance for infectious diseases and also medical care for emergencies. If they were seriously ill, of course they would need to go to hospital. They used the same standards for the refugees as they did for Hong Kong residents.

**I: What about the death rate, was it high?**

Lee: The death rate wasn't high, but when they [the refugees] first arrived, there was some confusion as to where the dead bodies were kept. In the first few days there was some confusion because some refugees had died and it was not clear where the bodies were kept. Surely they were kept there, but it was difficult to trace. The other thing was food supply; because there were thousands of people we had to prepare the food within the camp and this created a big problem. I think gradually it settled down, but during the first few weeks when there were thousands of people arriving every day it wasn't easy. You could see the Governor, accompanied by the Director of Medical and Health Services having to go there to the Princess Margaret Hospital to [survey] the situation.

**I: How did you balance that? Did you still have to maintain health services for Hong Kong residents?**

Lee: That's right. It wasn't easy but we had the AMS. They were volunteers with special duties to help.

**I: Did the AMS have experience in handling emergency crisis [situations]?**

Lee: Yes, they are trained for this purpose. [This is] because sometimes we have natural disasters such as landslides; once we had a big disaster in Kowloon. A lot of the AMS volunteers are doctors and nurses [and] in fact they are under the sector of Security

**I: But before the Vietnamese situation, did they have many chances to develop their skills? Were there a lot of emergency cases?**

Lee: In the old days, when you were born in Hong Kong, you would have to attend one of the Auxiliary Services to get training. It could be Auxiliary Medical Services, it could be Auxiliary Air force Services, it could be Auxiliary Fire Services [or] the Civil Aid Service, depending on the instance. [This is] because in Hong Kong we could appoint [people to the role]. But later on, [participation in the Auxiliary Services] changed to become voluntary. For example, in the early years, 1960's, we had an immunization campaign against cholera. We had to use a lot of staff to go onto the streets to [undertake] vaccinations. So we used the Medical students and we used the Auxiliary Medical Services to go out to do vaccinations. That's why their response to the call for emergency is very import. Previously, I also made use of AMS and the medical students to go to the Island [where the refugees were located in the camp] to undertake vaccination campaign. This was very important. We had headquarters for the training of people; some of them were retired teachers who were very helpful. This is the medical emergency services. Apart from the refugees, the other thing was the immunisation campaign against cholera.

**I: What were some of the common causes of death amongst the Vietnamese refugees?**

Lee: I think some of the common causes of death were old age. [And then] if they had to rush into the High Seas under very difficult circumstances, some of them were already suffering from poor health and not really fit for this kind of travel.

**I: So in other words, a lot of those cases happened when they first arrived and not after they had stayed here for a while?**

Lee: When they first arrived, first they had to wait – they didn't know whether or not they were allowed to come to Hong Kong and they were worried. And then during this kind of emergency, their health would certainly be adversely affected. But after they had settled down into the refugee camp, it would be very peaceful and quiet. Some of them would run their own schools in the refugee camps, classes. During that kind of period, their life was uncertain. Any contact with their family members may not have been easy – some family members might be here or there [located all over the place]. For the Management [of the camps] there were a lot of problems relating to the diet and accommodation [of the refugees]. We had to make sure there were arrangements [in place]. I think for the first few months, it was a difficult time – both for the refugees and also for the Hong Kong Government Departments. [This was] because we had no [previous] experience and we didn't know how to deal with them. We were short on staff [under resourced] and short on accommodation. We had to build refugee camps and we had to use a prison to keep the refugees. The prison wasn't initially for refugees [but for prisoners] and we had to use the prison for the Vietnamese refugees, resulting in overcrowding and so on. Afterwards, they [the refugees] settled down and then they organised themselves in helping one another. That required some time, but it is a very good recognition... it's very important. I was particularly concerned, so I had to go around to all the refugee camps and we did the best we could. I think the problem was shortage of staff at that time, and also a lack of experience in dealing with [the situation previously]. So we had to [deal with the situation] as an 'emergency' [situation]. But I always have high praise for the Auxiliary Medical Services, because they responded immediately [in a] high-risk situation, using a helicopter... [Laughs]

**I: After the situation at Hue Fong, how much longer did your involvement with the Vietnamese boat people continue?**

Lee: I was in the Headquarters, so the Mental Health Department and Public Health field, so I was concerned with ensuring that there were no infectious diseases occurring in the camps. Not just in containing the diseases so they didn't spread out from the camps, but making sure that the refugees were kept in a healthy [environment] so they could live and study etc.... and so they [the refugees] remained happy. We worked with the UNHCR and were supposed to get funding from the UNHCR, but [the UNHCR] never gave us any money! So we had to use our local resources to help the refugees. That's alright though, because it was to help the [refugees] and to protect not only the health of the people in Hong Kong, but the people inside the camps; the refugees themselves as well. So this is a

good way to serve the community.

**I: How long were you involved with the Vietnamese refugee program?**

Lee: Throughout the years, because I was [located] in Headquarters. I don't know how many years...

**I: Until retirement?**

Lee: No. See, afterwards, some of them went to other countries and others stayed in Hong Kong.

**I: That's 2000.**

Lee: So they became Hong Kong citizens and we didn't specially keep them [separate]. Previously, they were kept in the refugee camps [closed camps] but later they were allowed to come out and became part of the Hong Kong citizens [community].

**I: So you were involved with the [Vietnamese refugee] situation all the way until the end, which was May 2000? What year did you retire from your position?**

Lee: I retired in 1994.

**I: So you were basically involved in the whole [situation]?**

Lee: Yes, from the beginning until the end.

**I: How did the situation with the Vietnamese refugees affect your job, ever since [the start]?**

Lee: In a way, it's our responsibility in the Mental Health Department to protect the health of the people, so that the refugees wouldn't bring infectious diseases into Hong Kong. Now this is very important because we knew that Vietnam in an endemic area [with evidence of the] plague, and in Hong Kong we have a dense population. So we had to make sure that infectious diseases would not be introduced into Hong Kong. So we had to [undertake] a lot of prevention control measures and provide treatment and care. This was on a sustained basis. And then we had to provide medical care for thousands of refugees; if they were sick where they would go to see a doctor and if they needed hospitalisation, where they would be admitted. It was our responsibility.

**I: Would you say in your career life, the situation with the Vietnamese was the most challenging [situation] for you?**

Lee: One of the most challenging, because I had other challenging public health measures. I have just written a book on my most memorable days on public health in English. This is going to be published in the UK, and is already in printing. [The book includes] my most memorable days on public health in Hong Kong, together with [other peoples' memoirs from other parts of the world]. I did mention about Vietnamese refugees [in the book]. Other memories include when I worked in Hong Kong, I first started my work in 1960. At first we had to meet the [former] Director of Medical and Health Services, Dr PH Tang. I went to meet him at Headquarters and he asked me where I would like to work, because we had to be interviewed. I said I would like to work in 'Port Health'. This made him jump up and say, 'all the doctors say they want to work in hospitals, why port health?' [This was] because Port Health was the [first point of prevention for] the introduction of infectious diseases into countries. So ships coming from infected countries would have to be inspected, and making sure passengers wouldn't be bringing in infectious diseases. Then they would be allowed to enter and go ashore.

Now the reason I said I wanted to work in Port Health was that in the [final] examinations, I was the first in the class in Public Health. So I am very good! And furthermore, Dr PH Tang was in the Port Health Office. When you work in the Port Health Office, you are like a naval person; you would go up to inspect the ship. You would be able to wear a naval uniform, which was very admirable. So I thought it would be useful to work there. Of course he didn't post me to Port Health but he posted me to the New Territories. The New Territories was also very challenging work, because the New Territories at that time were very rudimentary, very rural. So I had to work in the floating dispensary. What do you mean by the floating dispensary? Because these people [in the islands] were fishermen and villagers, and if they are sick, they are too far away to reach the urban centres. So we had to bring them medical care to this area. We used a floating dispensary to bring them medical care there.



I was a doctor to see the patients, provide immunisations and medical care. We didn't charge [the patients] because in the Hong Kong Service, it doesn't matter whether you have money or not. We would bring the services to the outlying islands. So I worked in the floating dispensary to see the rural people. [Nowadays] these people have left the islands to move to the United Kingdom to operate ration businesses. They earn a lot of money in UK and every ten years they have a Thanksgiving [celebration]. They still remember me and will invite me to attend these celebrations... [Shows photograph] This is the clothing I wore specifically to provide vaccinations. It was very memorable. When I was located there [on the floating dispensary] I never wore any tie or jacket, I just wore a short-sleeved shirt [and] short trousers and I worked there. So this was the way we worked in Public Health. So we did a lot of work in the New Territories and it was very memorable there. Also cholera was very important in the early days because we were short of water supply and this was also very challenging for us to prevent the spread of cholera.

[Dr Lee shows more photographs to interviewer]

Lee: This is my boss, Dr Jerome Choy and I worked in the Headquarters responsible for developing all the Medical and Health Services Hospitals. The other memory is, I don't know if you have heard of Methadone? In the old days, drug addicts were usually addicted to opium, heroin. One day, also in the 1970's, there was a shortage of heroin. So the smugglers raised the price of heroin, and the drug addicts had to find the money to buy the high-priced heroin. So in order to find money, they committed a lot of crimes such as robbing and so on. So Dr Jerome Choy opened up Methadone clinics. Methadone clinics were to provide Methadone to the drug addicts so they didn't have to rely on opium. They could go back to work; they could carry on with their normal activities. But we had to open these Methadone clinics throughout the territories. So Dr Choy was instructed by the Governor to open Methadone clinics; over 20 clinics in 2 weeks' times. So after the meeting he came back to the office and he asked me to do it. So I took up the challenge to open more than 20 Methadone clinics through the territories. I used AMS members. The AMS members responded, and so did some emergency staff. This was because you had to make sure the Methadone was taken up by the drug addict [at the clinic] because otherwise [the drug addicts] would sell the Methadone to other people. So every day the addicts would go to the Methadone clinic to take their Methadone and the problem would be over. Now Methadone was very important because it could be a substitute for drug addicts. [This is] because if you share needles, there is the risk of spreading HIV/AIDS. But if you use Methadone, you won't have to share needles; it's a very good way to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS. Now Methadone is well-used in Taiwan, China and Hong Kong. Every day we had 6,000 people going to the Methadone clinics to take Methadone.

**I: Did you have to deal with any Vietnamese refugees who were drug addicts?**

Lee: At that time, our clinics mostly dealt with those inside the camp and our Doctor dealt with those [cases]. But it didn't seem to be a big problem [amongst the Vietnamese refugees] but maybe on an individual basis? But in Hong Kong, we had heroin addicts all the time so we had to provide services for them. Now we still provide services for them.

[male]: The problem comes when they take the medical exam for immigration to the United States, Canada and Australia, and it is found they have been taking drugs. It's a big problem because they [the refugees] can't be resettled until they have been cleared as drug addicts.

**I: So did the Department have to handle the health inspection for clearance before departure as well for all the refugees that were resettled?**

Lee: We didn't do the clearance. It would be up to the individual receiving countries.

[male]: But the doctors would examine and clear the refugees and continue treatment. Also the doctor inside the camp would make the Vietnamese refugees 'fit' to be cleared to sign out of the camps [every time they came in and out of the camp].

**I: In your career life, I see twenty years out of thirty-five years working with the Vietnamese refugees. Did that change what you thought of when you first entered this profession?**

Lee: In the early days, we would never have thought of such an incident, because we had never come across this kind of international affair. But in a way, I think the Medical and Health Department and other Government Departments were very concerned with this subject and we did our best in working with the UNHCR and we had communications with them. [This is] because this is an international matter so we had to work together. And fortunately we had the support of the other Government Agencies and the AMS played a very important role. When I have an opportunity, I will often pay tribute to the AMS because they are dedicated to serving the community.



Hong Kong, over the years needs to cast its eyes further – not just locally, but regionally and internationally. [This is] because we need to work more closely together [with the rest of the global community].

**I: Was there any time the public complained about the services that were provided to them being affected because the Vietnamese refugees came to Hong Kong?**

Lee: Not so much a complaint but of course there were some cases of local people who I remember having to stay in the Chin Mun area. But generally, the Vietnamese people didn't cause any disturbance to the local people. Now firstly, they [the refugees] are kept inside the camp and don't upset the local people. But there were one or two occasions where the Vietnamese boat people had some sort of complaint inside the camp. But so far their activities were inside the camp, not outside the camp. So there wasn't much opposition from the local people [of Hong Kong].

**I: Looking back, were there any specific incidents that were most memorable to you, whether good or bad?**

Lee: Probably the most memorable experience for me was the first boat arriving in Hong Kong. This was the most memorable because at that time, we didn't really know the situation. Because after they [the Vietnamese refugees] had come in and become settled, then we knew what to do and we could do it slowly – part by part – because we had the facilities. But when they first arrived, it wasn't easy.

**I: Did you remember how many days it took for you to clear the inspections for the people at Huey Fong?**

Lee: I think it was about a week.

**I: I think I remember reading there were two women giving birth during that time in Huey Fong?**

Lee: I remember two babies. We also used a small boat to go near the Hue Fong. It was a very memorable occasion. When I went to attend the [initial] meeting, I didn't know what it was all about. And the meeting was chaired by the CS.

**I: What did the whole situation with the Vietnamese refugees mean to you?**

Lee: I think the Vietnamese refugees are almost part of our local people [of Hong Kong]. For those who wanted to go overseas of course had their own freedom [to do so] and they are accepted by the receiving countries. But those who do not go [overseas] and remain in Hong Kong are then ultimately part of the Hong Kong citizens. Because [in] Hong Kong, most of the people are like the refugees [as there are many races living there]. A lot of people are from China, because in the old days, there was a free movement [of people]. You didn't need a passport or visa; from Guangdong you can come to Hong Kong. Most of the people in Hong Kong are from Mainland China. It was only later on that we had all these kinds of restrictions. But I think Hong Kong is built into partnership with these people in developing Hong Kong. I think we have the same common goal to serve the people and build up the area.

**I: In looking back, do you ever wish it didn't happen?**

Lee: I don't know, because in those days, there was fighting between North and South Vietnam. And I think it was reasonable for those people in South Vietnam who weren't certain about their future, it was natural for them to leave. Even now in other places, even in China there were people leaving to come to Hong Kong. But of course Vietnam is a very nice country. I have also been to Vietnam... [Discusses places in Vietnam he has been to and enjoys visiting].

**I: Thank you. Is there anything else you would like to add?**

Lee: As I mentioned, there is a book on Public Health which will be published soon. The story on the refugees will also be included in the book. In 2003, we had the SARS epidemic. Now we have to cast our eyes wider, we have to take into account the global situation and globalisation. We have to work [more] closely together in helping one another. Particularly in this region, Hong Kong is an area where 'east meets west' and we have to work more closely in the Asia-Pacific region helping one another. Sometimes, some countries – not that they don't want to cooperate – but they are short on resources. Even in Vietnam, they are short on resources. We now have an arrangement with

Vietnam in that some of their specimens are sent to Hong Kong for analysis. So we should work together to help some of these countries where they are under-provided in expertise and resources; help them and train them. This will help to improve the situation globally, so we have to work together. The three 'M's are: 'multi-sectorial', 'multi-professional' and 'multi-disciplinary'. Normally in Hong Kong at the regional and international levels, I will often go to China and we will often work closely together with communication being very important. Collaboration is very important. I always say, 'infectious diseases don't stop at the border'. So we have to work closer together.

**I: When will we have the pleasure to read your book?**

Lee: I don't know. I will let you know when it becomes available.

**I: In the next few months?**

Lee: It was coordinated by our Director who invited me to provide a chapter on Hong Kong.

**I: That would be great, thank you Dr Lee.**



## Lien Tran

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Interview date: 14 September 2013  
Time: 8:00 pm  
Place: Residence in Hong Kong (HK)  
Name: Tran Thi Lien  
DOB: 13 May 1969  
Place of birth: Hai Phong

Tran came to HK in 1988 from Hai Phong

Tran said life in Vietnam was very difficult, she finished high school but could not find work because she did not have money for bribery and did not know someone in the government that could help her get a job.

There were 35 people on her boat, including four small children. The journey took them 1 month. The boat was so old, after two weeks it leaked and almost sunk. Luckily, Chinese fishermen rescued them. The foods they brought were ruined by seawater so they had to beg for food until they reached HK.

Upon arrival, they were placed in Kai Tak detention centre, only then that they knew about the 'screening policy'.

Tran described life at Kai Tak was hard. There was not enough food and clothes, and there was lack of medical treatments. Tran often got sick, her eyes were infected, she was in constant pain but not until she was transferred to Whitehead detention centre that she received medical treatment, which was nearly a year later. Her eyes were badly affected.

More than a year after Tran arrived in HK, she was screened out because she failed to meet refugee status. She continued to stay in detention centre for another six years.

Tran said that at the Whitehead detention centre there was constant fighting, either among Vietnamese detainees or between the detainees and the authorities to protest forced repatriations.

Tran revealed that the biggest stress for everyone in the detention centre was the fear of repatriation. Everyone was worried about what the Vietnamese government will do to him or her when they returned. The worst 'nightmare' in the detention centre, she said, was listening to the announcement over loud speakers about the government's intention to return everyone to Vietnam. The announcement was made in Vietnamese and was constantly repeated every few hours. She said it was very damaging to everyone's moral, people did not feel like doing anything, not even to learn English.

In 1995, after witnessing the horrific incident at section 7, Tran decided to repatriate voluntary. She said, "When I left Vietnam I never thought I would stay in HK this long and I certainly did not ever want to return".

Several days leading to the incident, camp authorities alerted all detainees in section 7 that they will be transferred to another camp. At the time, there were more than 2,000 VBP at section 7. The detainees assumed that they would be forced to repatriate once they were removed, so they were planning to resist the removal.

When the event took place, Tran stays at section 8, but went to visit a friend at section 7 the night before the 'transferring' date. Her friend's hut was close to the main gate. At about 5 am, she was alerted that there were many policemen inside section 7. She quickly got out and she stood outside the gate to observe the tragedy took place inside the camp from early morning until late in the evening.

Tran said that she could never forget what she had witnessed. The police discharged teargas toward the detainees inside section 7 non-stop, starting from early morning until 5 or 6 pm.

It was chaotic, people were running around in different directions, affected by the teargas, they could not breathe, they could not see, people were coughing and crying.

Some detainees climbed on the rooftop to protest and could not get down. As soon as they got down from the roof, they were severely beaten by police with batons. Tran watched one of her friends being beat up so much that he had many broken bones and one his eyes was permanently damaged.

Three months after the incident, Tran returned to Vietnam. She said life in the country was even more unbearable than before she left. Two weeks later, Tran and 14 other people who also returned from HK jumped on a boat and set sailed to HK again. Her family did not know she was leaving and she left before receiving the money that she was supposed to receive from the UNHCR under the volunteer repatriation scheme.

Similarly, the journey took them about a month. This time, Tran said it was different because there was hardly any boat heading to HK as it was the first time she went in 1988.

When Tran returns to HK she knew that she would be sent back to Vietnam but she was determined not to stay in Vietnam. Tran explained that she and the other people on the boat reported to the authorities upon arrival that they were once in HK and had returned to Vietnam. She said that they were treated the same as everyone else even though the government knew that they were 'double-backers' the term the government used when referring to those who came back.

A year later, Tran's friend arranged for her to meet with a man from HK, at the detention centre where she stayed. They became friends and later got married and have one daughter. When I met Tran in 2013, her daughter was finishing high school and Tran was working at a local factory.

Reflecting on her experience as refugee in HK, Tran said that she felt neutral about the HK Government. She said, "in general, the government was not very difficult, but as things escalated, they had to take harsh action". Tran claims the war that caused all the pain and sorrow, "No one wants to leave, and even birds do not want to leave their nest... I am now at peace and I live my life with purpose." she said.

Tran's sister, who came to HK with her in 1995, got married and had three children while staying in the detention centre. They volunteered to return to Vietnam, sadly, her husband got depressed and became a drug addict.



## Lionel Lam

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Interviewee: Lionel Lam (LL)

Interviewer: (I)

10:10AM, Saturday September 11 2013, Lionel Lam's Office, Hong Kong

**I: May I please have your full name, your date of birth and where you were born?**

LL: Lionel Lam-Kin. I was born on the 5th of December in 1945, officially, in Shan-Ho China. The reason why I mention 'officially' was that my date of birth – as far as concerned in Hong Kong – was translated from my lunar calendar date of birth. My true date of birth should be the 18th January. Because people in China didn't always record their date of birth according to the lunar calendar, I was born on the fifth day of the twelfth moon in 1945. Hence I have two birth dates.

**I: I have heard similar stories in Vietnam too.**

LL: I'm sure a lot of people in Hong Kong have the same problem.

**I: Which date do you prefer to use now?**

LL: Well officially it is the 5th of December.

**I: Well you can always have two birthday celebrations.**

LL: I have three, in fact.

**I: How come?**

LL: There's the official date of birth, there's the regular date of birth and then there's lunar New Year – or lunar calendar – date of birth, which is the fifth day of the twelfth moon every year. So [my birthdates are] 5th of December, 18th January and the fifth day of the twelfth moon. So I have three birthdates. [Laughs].

**I: And if there is ever a lunar year or a lunar month, you will have four. Is that correct?**

LL: If it's a leap year, I might have four.

**I: Now, when did you get involved with the Vietnamese boat people?**

LL: 1978.

**I: And how did it all get started?**

LL: I was in charge of the Homicide Bureau, of the Hong Kong Police; [known] then as the Royal Hong Kong Police. On the 19th of December, the ship – Huey Fong – arrived in Hong Kong outside the Hong Kong boundary, which is called a 'square' boundary. It is the seafront of Hong Kong. The Police had to setup a special investigation team to deal with this situation, and I was appointed as the Deputy Head of that unit. The Head was another Senior Superintendent by the name of John Clements. He was then in charge of the Criminal Intelligence Bureau, whereas I was an Acting Superintendent in charge of the Homicide Bureau. The idea was that other than being the overall Commander of the Special Investigations Unit, he would be mainly responsible for the intelligence side of things. And

I would handle the investigative side of things.

**I: What was the main reason for your special unit to handle the arrivals?**

LL: This was something unprecedented in Hong Kong, and we wanted to find out...

**I: Was this for the Huey Fong?**

LL: Yes, the Huey Fong. If you want to go back to the history of these 'refugee ships', the first one that came to Hong Kong was the Tung An, which passed through Hong Kong and tried to come in, but was prevented from coming in, in that they were reprovisioned and sent away to eventually arrive in the Philippines. The Tung An was eventually moored in the Bay of Manilla. Then the ship Huey Fong – which is a Panama-registered ship belonging to a Hong Kong shipping company, crewed by Taiwanese seamen, arrived in Hong Kong on the 19th of December outside the square boundary, or Hong Kong waters.

**I: What's the difference between the Huey Fong and the Clara Maersk that came in May 1975?**

LL: I have no knowledge of the Clara Maas.

**I: That was the very first time Hong Kong experienced the [arrival] of the Vietnamese boat people. It was in May 1975, but the Clara Maersk actually picked up these distressed people at sea and there were more than 3000 [of the boat people].**

LL: I have no knowledge. I haven't come across that case.

**I: Let's go back to your case. At what time were you called in?**

LL: As soon as the ship, Huey Fong arrived, we had to set it up.

**I: Was it daytime or night time, do you remember?**

LL: It must have been during the day, I was in my office. When she [the ship] arrived, she sent a 'teleg' – or telegram – to the Marine Department of Hong Kong, saying that they had picked up these refugees from the high seas. They were floating in small boats in the high seas, and the [ship] had salvaged these people and taken them to Hong Kong, and asked permission to enter Hong Kong. But then, of course they were stopped, because we knew that this wasn't the truth. And eventually through my investigation we found out exactly what had transpired.

**I: What did you find out?**

LL: In fact, this ship had been hired from Bangkok and sailed to the Port of Vung Tau, outside Ho Chi Minh City. And all these people had paid real gold by way of fares to board the ship, to be brought to Hong Kong. There were approximately 3,000 of them [boat people]. The rate they had to pay was twelve taels [Chinese gold weight measurement] of gold, and we even found out through investigations that there was an address in Ho Chi Minh City. If I remember correctly, it was the Nguyen Du, a street in Saigon opposite a cinema called Rang Dong – The Palace Cinema. On the first floor of that address, they had set up tables, and the Vietnamese Officials would sit on one side and these people would come in producing gold – mainly in the form of gold leaf – of six inches by one inch in size, and one Chinese tael in weight.

And those who didn't have sufficient gold leaf would top them up with gold ornaments, which were all weighed and taken by the Officials, as a consideration for these people to go on board the Huey Fong. The money was apportioned – ten taels would go to the Officials. One tael would be taken by the racketeers who organised the ship to go to Saigon. The remaining one tael would go to the ship's crew. Children under the age of twelve did not have to pay. So they were all – in other words – fare paid passengers. Not refugees per se. And most of them were rich ethnic Chinese, from Saigon. Some of them had even tried to leave by boarding small boats in a fishing village called Ben Tre. Some of them had come all the way from there.

**I: Who hired that ship?**

LL: A group of ethnic Chinese, plus one Vietnamese person by the name of Nguyen, who obviously had a connection

with the Government. The ethnic Chinese was a family called Chan, who were involved in press stock business. And they got to know someone from Hong Kong – a Chinese person by the name of Kwok, who was married to a Vietnamese lady in Saigon and they had a son. And this person was doing trading between Hong Kong and Saigon. And he had connections with a shipping company on Hong Kong. And he had gone to Bangkok to strike up this deal with the ship's crew, and he then took the ship from Bangkok to Saigon. And when they arrived, this is how we found out from telegrams we seized from them that they were using codified messages etc. They had arrived at the Sand Island halfway through to rendezvous with the pilot ship, and then taken to Vung Tau where they moored and set anchor.

**I: So with the Officials collecting ten tales out of twelve, were they the ones who paid the rental fee?**

LL: No! The rental fee was the one tale that went to the ship's crew which was eventually seized by us from the ship. The reason that Kwok was involved was that his so-called wife – I think it was his mistress – and son out of Saigon. I think that was his advantage.

**I: So the Government got a whole lot [of gold] and didn't even have to pay for rental? [That's] unbelievable.**

LL: No. [It was the same for] the racketeers who also came with the boat. The Chan family was in Hong Kong – they had already arrived and were already doing business in Hong Kong – the father and son. They were eventually arrested of course. Nguyen Kuok was the main organiser from the Vietnamese end. And this Kwok was the Hong Kong liaison to escort the ship to Hong Kong.

**I: So what happened to Nguyen? Was he sentenced?**

LL: Yes. Here in Hong Kong. I haven't got the details, but I will try to dig out the report which should have been microfilmed by the Police records service.

**I: I have newspaper clips about that.**

LL: I think six defendants were all jailed in the case. The captain of the ship was a retired Colonel from the Taiwanese Navy. And he was a native of Szechuan, and spoke only Mandarin. And that was the reason I was involved, because I am a multi-dialect person. And it is one of the reasons I was given the task, because I can speak to them.

**I: What happened to the Vietnamese Officials? Were they ever questioned?**

LL: No, they didn't come with [the boat people].

**I: But the Hong Kong Government didn't raise anything with them?**

LL: Yes we did. The then Governor of Hong Kong, Sir MacLeHose, or Lord MacLeHose, went to Vienna and in a UN Conference, he disclosed that these ships were not refugee ships. These were fare-paid passengers. And he quoted what I just told you. Even the address in just told you, [stating] that this was where the gold changed hands. And it was a big expose to the world, so to say.

**I: So back to your experience, when you were first called out to Huey Fong, what was your reaction? What did you see?**

LL: Well the first time I boarded the Huey Fong, I was disguised as a member of the Marine Official Party. Because I didn't want to disclose my identity as a policeman. And I had myself all wired up, because I knew that I would be talking to the ship's captain and the crew. And it was stormy with rain pouring down when we boarded the ship. And I interviewed the ship's captain unofficially. I got the crew's list and there were thirteen of them. And I asked him details on each and every one [of the crew] because I knew that eventually I would have to interview these people and it would give me some background information to my investigation later on. The second time that I boarded the ship was after all the refugees had been allowed to land and that was a big operation. We had to use double-decker vehicular ferries to be used as a pontoon, for them to be transferred from the ship to smaller ferries to go ashore. And that is why I suggested that we should perhaps bring in an Immigration Officer to help me with all the documentation



and processing.

LL: The person who was involved at the working level was Paul Lok, and his boss was Tom Peters – my counter-part at that time.

**I: How long did it take you [to transfer the boat people across]?**

LL: Just one day, because it was a very well-planned investigation.

**I: So your job was more involved with investigating the criminal element of the ship.**

LL: I was given one month to put together a case against these perpetrators, by the then Secretary for Security in a meeting.

**I: And who was the Secretary in charge [at the time]?**

LL: Davis. Greg Davis.

**I: Ok, because I [had previously] met Alastair Asprey.**

LL: He was Alastair's predecessor. I was called to a meeting at the Government Secretariat, and I was the most junior, lowest-ranking officer at the meeting. He was sitting at one end of the table, and I was sitting at the other end of the big conference table. And he pointed his finger at me and said, 'Superintendent, I want you to put together a case against these people at all cost'. And like a fool, I didn't name my price. I should have said, 'yes, get me an instant promotion to Commissioner of Police' [laughs].

**I: Would you be happy if you were promoted?**

LL: Well I would be happy to be promoted but not to [the position] of Commissioner.

**I: So how did you complete it? Did you complete it in one month?**

LL: Yes I did. I worked seventeen hours a day. Because when we started off, we had no idea how to get in. All we had was this bogus story told to us by the ship's crew. And the boat people [refugees] were getting sick and had to be air-lifted to land, and taken to hospital for treatment. And I would be sending teams to the hospitals to interview these people. And they would come up with the same old story because they were being coached, being primed [for arrival in Hong Kong].

**I: Do you mean they were being coached on the ship before arrival?**

LL: We learned this later, the captain, through his interpreter had talked to all the people and told them that if they were ever questioned by the authorities, this is what you should tell them. He was a fellow-countryman; his wife was also an Immigration Officer who eventually worked after the handover for the British Consulate for a short while.

**I: So back to your investigation. Did you have to interview them in the hospital as well?**

LL: My team did. And they all came back with the same old story.

**I: That would have been frustrating.**

LL: But that eventually became part of our evidence against the perpetrators, the syndicate. The reason why I had to work 17 hours/day was because I only had one month to 'crack the case', essentially. So I would send teams out. Before I sent the teams out, I would brief them as to what I required and expected of them. And they would all go out, and then come back afterwards to be debriefed by me. I would take their statements which I would go through, and then I would plan work for them the next day – assignments for the next day. In the meantime also, the team of Junior Officers who could read English; who had a higher English standard would then go to the Cable and Wireless in Hong Kong. When we first went, they wouldn't allow us access to the telegrams, so I had to go and get a Court warrant to do that.

Eventually, they agreed to assist. It was through this that we surfaced the telegrams that said 'rendezvous at this place at such a date'. And this was how we found out about their voyage. And eventually when we came to question the crew, we already had something to go on with. And it took them by surprise, in two ways. When I saw the crew for the first time, I told you I [had taken] down their details. And so I lined them up and said, 'First Officer, from Guangzhou, who is Cantonese' [and then] 'You, First Engineer, from Taiwan and you speak Ethnic Amoy' and then I pointed at the two radio officers and said to them, 'you're both from Shanghai, Tze Chiang. Both of them were from Shanghai, [that region].

The funniest one was the cook, who was ethnic [speaks Chinese] but from Cambodia. I said to him, [speaks Chinese]. Same with those from Taiwan, I used my Amoy dialect which I could speak. They thought I knew a lot about them. So it's interesting. So when we eventually, formally interviewed them, they all told the truth. They all opened up, except for the gold. There were three hundred pounds, or the equivalent of three thousand tales of gold on the ship which was the share of the crew. Where did they hide them? [The gold] was hidden in the disused oil tank of the ship, which had a skeleton, or shelves. And they were wrapped in poly-urethane papers in twenty-eight packages, resting on the shelves.

Then they pumped seawater in to cover them. And through investigation, the Chief Engineer – through interrogation – eventually disclosed [where the gold was hidden]. So I had to get assistance from the Customs Department, Customs Service and the Marine Department Engineers to empty the oil tank. And we sent divers in to retrieve these twenty-eight packages. Right away, I had them shipped ashore under escort by my senior assistants. And weigh them straightaway that night, to make sure it was the right quantity. And that same night, [I] also deposited the Government treasury boat.

Eventually all these bits and pieces had to be examined by the Government Chemist to certify it was all pure gold, 99.9%; because that is evidence in Court. There was always the possibility of the defence arguing that this wasn't gold but gilded metal, so it was all part of our proof. It's interesting putting together a conspiracy case, in one month. I personally interviewed a captain – the ship's captain – and the hand-written statement came to fifty-two pages which was eventually produced in Court and wasn't challenged. The defence council was the Queen's Counsel (QC), nowadays known as the Senior Council, and he said he was happy that the statements were taken properly without duress, coercion or threat. And they were admitted as evidence.

**I: What happened to the boat people?**

LL: They were allowed to land. And I mentioned earlier we used double-decker vehicular ferries. Before that, I had to go onto the ship to look at the conditions, and that's when I got emotional. I saw children reaching out to me from the manholes, the windows and I had brought for them chocolate and biscuits to hand out to them. And when you see fellow human being treated like cattle, it's not nice. And even for me, supposedly a 'macho' person, I broke down in tears. So I can imagine the things you went through, the hardship you went through.

**I: I sat with my knees to my chin with my little brother and sister on each side and I was sixteen [years old]. And we were shot at by Malaysian military.**

LL: Now that's another story. Another ship called Hai Hong, went to Malaysia and they were not allowed to [enter]. They were reprovioned. The Officer I mentioned earlier – his name was John Clements – went to Malaysia to learn more about the whole thing. Eventually after the investigation [was over], we set ourselves up as an Intelligence Agency and we would monitor ships leaving Vietnam. And we identified them. And there were quite a few of them. We got details from the Marine Department and we announced them through the International Media scene, which would stop them [discourage them] from coming to Hong Kong.

**I: So you knew they were in Malaysia and you wanted to make sure they [the ships] wouldn't come here [to Hong Kong]?**

LL: Well, basically from the Hong Kong point of view, we tried to stop all these refugee boats. We couldn't cope with them [because] we already had the Huey Fong, and then later on the Skyluck, the Tung An and a few others. And there was no way we could cope.

**I: Through my research, I'm aware that the situation of Vietnamese boat people in Hong Kong was by far the most complicated. In so many aspects, especially the condition of Hong Kong compared to the other regions.**

LL: I must say that we treated them in the most humane way compared with the other countries. I know this for a fact, you will have personal experience.

**I: Well, my boat was pulled up to an uninhabited island by local authorities and left there. We were in the jungle and people started to die. At sixteen, I tried to deliver a baby. And my sister and brother and I, we all had high fevers. We were all ready to die. So I know hardship. So after the Huey Fong, how else were you involved with the Vietnamese boat people?**

LL: Well as I said, we continued with intelligence-gathering and all that. But I wasn't doing this whole thing – the special investigations – on a fulltime basis. Although I had to work seventeen hours a day, at the same time I had to look after my original Homicide Bureau. So I was doing two jobs at the same time.

**I: So you weren't allowed to just focus on this only?**

LL: No.

**I: Not just time-constrained, but it would have been hard to focus.**

LL: With the Huey Fong, I was fully involved. I was really in charge of it and ran the whole investigation. But there were other investigations going on at the same time being undertaken by my unit – murder cases, for instance. So I had to supervise those as well.

**I: For the Huey Fong, did you ever have to send anyone to Vietnam to verify anything? Or just based on what you had here?**

LL: No, we had enough evidence. The gold itself spoke for itself. It wouldn't have just dropped from heaven.

**I: After that, were there any other incidents with the Vietnamese boat people that you experienced?**

LL: The Tek Ang was a small boat, less than a thousand tonnes. It was hired by some racketeers from Macau, and it went to pick up refugees from Hun Tao as well. The ship's operator was a family with the surname Po, and they brought back less than a hundred [boat people]. And one of the family members that I mentioned to you earlier was the 'Ni' family. This young lady, as soon as they arrived, they weren't allowed to land initially. So she contacted the American Consulate, and she was taken to the American Consulate to be fed and looked after and made comfortable. And she came up with this story that her uncle had been murdered on the ship. So we had to step up and investigate. In the meantime, we also investigated the operation of the ship and eventually they were prosecuted. The murder case was committed in international waters on board the ship, when it was in international waters there was nothing we could do about it. It turned out to be a mentally deranged person – the uncle – and he was thrown overboard by the ship's crew on the high seas.

**I: Was it to protect others on the ship?**

LL: For whatever reason, he was causing trouble or whatever. They didn't want him to cause trouble.

**I: Your unit was to investigate really serious cases or any conspiracies?**

LL: My unit was mainly involved with serious crime, e.g. murder cases. The Huey Fong was different. It was something that called for my investigation expertise and ability to speak different dialects.

**I: Anymore cases after these two?**

LL: No. Related to Vietnamese refugees were just those.

**I: I was just interested in those relating to the Vietnamese boat people.**

LL: I'm sorry I don't have much to tell you.

**I: You can pick and choose from history and hopefully it will make sense of something that happened. And so I thank you for your time and for sharing. When you look back at these two events in time, what does it mean to you? Did it make you feel one way or another; do you wish it didn't happen?**

LL: Of course I wish it didn't happen. I feel sorry that such a tragic experience should happen to fellow human beings. As I told you, I personally went through the experience of having to leave my hometown and come back to civilisation again. But compared to those people on the Huey Fong, it is nothing. I am much luckier than them.

**I: The outcome of the case; in your mind was justice served? Did those men serve for the crime appropriately?**

LL: Well if you could call it a crime, then yes. Justice was served. But ... trying to be philosophical, these people were also victims of history. Although they tried to make use and profit from the situation, you could argue that if the ship didn't go to Vietnam, all those people would have to find other more risky ways of leaving the country, or continuing to stay in the country and suffer even more. In a way, they were saviours. And life is like that.

**I: It's true.**

LL: But as far as I am concerned as a Police Officer, my job is to investigate crime and it was a crime perpetrated by different parties of people. And we have brought justice, and justice was done.

**I: Thank you very much.**



## Mak Pak Lam



Interviewee: Mak Pak Lam (MPL)  
Interviewer: (I)

MPL: [Starts speaking on record] So I am seeing something, possibly Peter may not be aware, and I don't want to infringe on any of these. In 1975 or '76, when the Vietnamese people came in – I don't know whether you want to put this in the records, but I am telling you the true story – that in actual fact, at the time when the prison population was low, Tom Gardener picked up the refugee boat people. Not entirely on instruction of the Correctional Services. Because he is a very careful man. He knew the population was low. He won't take up the boat people. In Headquarters where we had the meeting. Because when the prison population is low, our establishment is under control of this population. You can slaughter us, kill us, but we [cannot] change our establishment.

My boss was a very careful man, [to] take up the boat people. So the boat people almost equated to the population of the prison at one time. Eventually they exceeded the numbers. So we started a first camp in Kai Tak. Kai Tak is the name of the old airport in Hong Kong. We were scratching our heads, where to put the Vietnamese people. Where else can you put them? We were looking for abandoned housing and so on. Kai Tak was an airport with a Royal Air force there. And then maybe they had moved away from their old building, so it was a place where we could accommodate quite a few people. So we took them in. And built the first Kai Tak East camp. Eventually there was a

Kai Tak West camp.

**I: What month and year was that?**

MPL: I can't recall the exact year or month. But it should be in the year 1977 or 1978.

**I: So you mean after the Skyluck? Or before?**

MPL: Skyluck came after. When Skyluck came into Hong Kong, they broke through the security. It was '79. It could be earlier. Because in '79, I left in 1980. And I saw the Skyluck and everything. So the Marine Department – or Security of Hong Kong – was quite embarrassed when Skyluck moved in unnoticed. And the Hong Kong Government was quite embarrassed and Skyluck was tied up somewhere. And then [the] Hong Kong Government refused to land the refugees from their boat. They [the Hong Kong Government] refused, hoping the problem would go away]. Therefore we had no accommodation for [those on] Skyluck. But Hong Kong was in a situation that in July [of that year]; a typhoon [came] to Hong Kong. So the Skyluck refugees were very clever. They tied up their Captain; let the boat adrift so that it grounded on Lama Island. So the boat people from Skyluck all scattered all over [the island] and ran away. At that time, the Hong Kong Government accepted them without choice into the detention camps.

**I: What was your role when you started working?**

MPL: I was a Camp Commander. And that was the time I worked with Talbot Bashall. Talbot Bashall was at that time a Prison Officer. Since 1953, I ascertained from him that he joined in the same year as me. I graduated from the same college [as him] in 1952, and joined the Department in 1953. When you graduated from Queens College, there were two conditions. Number 1, you must be very clever. Number 2, you must have a lot of money to be able to go to University. I hadn't got both [of those things]. [Laughs]. So I came to look for a job, then I joined the Department here.

**I: What was the name of the Department?**

MPL: The Department was called the 'Prison Department'. Eventually in 1982, it changed to the Correctional Services Department. But we actually called it 'Her Majesty's Prison'. Hong Kong being a British colony, and even in the UK, they still call [the Department] 'Her Majesty's Prison' (HMP).

**I: Why was the prison department involved with assisting the Vietnamese boat refugees?**

MPL: Number 1, not many people can handle the containment and control of such a large number of people. Previously, at one time there were a large number of people who [previously] came to Hong Kong too. And the Hong Kong Government assigned the job of control to the CS – Civil Aid Services. But these people were volunteers. They were not professional or well-trained staff. So [these] volunteers were called up and simply went by routine. I haven't got much knowledge of the CS controls, but to be very frank, it was a failure. And then, the Prison Department was professionally well-trained to maintain control, operation containment, supply and everything [else associated]. It was not an easy matter with a large number [of people]. At one time, I think the highest number [of refugees] at Kai Tak was 8000 people at that time. Just imagine how we supplied food – it was not a small matter. Also, for taking baths, the water supply. And the clearance of waste. They had the boats tied along Kai Tak, and there were three or four boats simply for emptying [waste]. That's why the prison 'reached out its hand' to receive the boat people. Or to welcome them.

**I: What was your main role at the time? What were you involved in?**

MPL: My capacity? They called me Camp Commander.

**I: And what were your day-to-day activities with the refugees?**

MPL: So at that time with the refugee people in Hong Kong, we screened them. They were classified into 'II' – Illegal Immigrants, etc. At that time when we first landed, the first screening was by the Immigration Officer. At that time when I was in command of the refugee people, I had the Immigration police and the volunteer agency working under my control. So the Immigration police patrol and AMS and all these other volunteer agencies operated eight camps at one time. The first one was Kai Tak East. Eventually, they had [others]. There were two types of camps. One was a 'closed camp', and the other one was by volunteer agencies. Maybe the YMCA would take that up too. But the volunteer agencies [ran] open camps for the people to work, and come back. And the [refugees] were screened and



possibly assigned a country to go to by the UN. So in your closed camps, they had the same operation of screening. But when they were screened, they would be moved into another camp waiting for conveyances i.e. airplanes to take them to another place.

**I: What were some of the criteria for screening the refugees?**

MPL: That was none of my business. My business was containment. To keep them together. But it was a very 'loose' control, because they are not subject to control. They are free people. They had already run away from their country. So we did not apply prison regulations on them. Although we could to a certain extent. But mostly, if they had committed any offences in the camp, we charged them criminally. And once they had a criminal record, we would 'de-bar' them for the privilege of returning. Most of the screening was done by Immigration.

The screening inclusive of classifying where they come from i.e. are they really Vietnamese boat people? Many of them were people from China who rowed out their boats to join them. So Immigration would ask those questions and then they could identify who they were. And also, it was a very complicated sort of situation. When [the] boat people [first] came [to Hong Kong], they were [initially] from South Vietnam. Eventually they were [coming from] North Vietnam. I'm not too familiar with [them], but North Vietnamese were mostly 'Viet-Cong' and they were 'warrior-like' people. So when they arrived on their boats, we searched and we found opium and weapons and everything. So in our situation, control [of the refugees] was very difficult, as there were North and South Vietnamese. They were possibly not in good harmony with each other. So our staff would police them.

**I: What were some of the incidents between the North and South Vietnamese that you remember the most?**

MPL: During our time, because it was pretty early, the riots and all these things I mentioned were not during our time. Possibly because we loved them. We didn't create any animosity or hostility. We loved them. I use the term very loosely. Because we had so many people, and during our time, we sent the police boats to bring them in. We had helicopters seeing the Vietnamese people arriving and we ushered them into the Hong Kong harbour. So they came into the camp and you know the psychology of the Vietnamese refugees when they see land, you know, they have a sense of security. They become safe. So eventually, if you treat them well, honestly, not making implications of riots, etc. That educated people are not treated well, it could partly be a factor. But during our time, because they were the first arrivals, [of the first few arrivals] the first 50 batches, they were treated well.

I had a woman giving birth outside my office. [All these things] happened. So my staff [would] usually tell me, 'Sir, we have one baby. Shall we order a roast plate?' We were very friendly. The only thing was, we are well-trained. Prison staff was well trained. The police were well-trained. The police would not go inside the camps at all. They were standing by, in case of something happening. AMS (Auxiliary Medical Services) would volunteer. But we don't take care of any medical problems inside the camp. We would just call up the ambulance and refer them to the local hospital. But we had a lot of people volunteering from CS. During my time, I didn't quite accept them. Because many of them were young, untrained. They came into the refugee camps and many of the young girls, and so, spent time talking to each other.

**I: How long were you in this position when you were working with the Vietnamese refugees?**

MPL: In the prison service I worked for twenty years. I joined the same year that Talbot Bashall did. I just confirmed that. And we left at almost the same time. I left in 1988. So I had 20 years in prison service. But for the camp, I took over from Bonnie Wong. Bonnie Wong was assisting the European Officer by the name of Garth Heiss. Do you know him? That was the time when he took over from Freddie. Garth Heiss was one of the Officers in the Prison Department as well. So that was 1970. I worked in the refugee camp for about two and a half years. From 1976 or '75. I can't quite remember, it was roughly that year. In 1979 I went back to prisons. Because I was acting as Assistant Commissioner in the Prison Services. And then I was sent to the UK, and I was working for an Institute.

**I: When you look back, what did those few years mean to you?**

MPL: Honestly, what I can remember was that I was overwhelmed. I was very busy because I had to travel from one camp to ensure man-control. Man-control was when you take the powers of the atmosphere in each situation. I was in charge of all the prisons in Hong Kong. But practically everywhere I go, I'm not taking credit... All the prisons I took over – Garth Heiss is a very good friend of mine – because he knew me, he said when I took over from him everything was peaceful, because there was no [triads] society, except one mixed society. [Laughs]. So I practically was in charge of these prisons and that was the time when [speaks Chinese] Chet Ho was the drug ring leader in the



area. He was arrested, and put inside the [prison].

I was in charge during that time of Peter Kot Ba [Laughs]. Peter Kot Ba was arrested by the ICAC and he was a high-ranking police officer. When ICAC was setup in 1972, it was an independent Hong Kong at one time, rightly or wrongly, because this is its history, was very corrupted. So I am not proving or confirming the corruptibility of the Hong Kong police or anything, but it was quite common [corruption]. So when I said that he was 'set-up', they arrested quite a lot of police, [but] they had no evidence to arrest high-ranking police. But at one time, they had the opportunity [to arrest] a British high-ranking policeman, a chief superintendent who was very high-ranking. And he was put inside here [the prison] for five years.

**I: With the Vietnamese refugees, what were some of the difficulties you had experience?**

MPL: Honestly, I was not too much on the ground. I wasn't on the daily patrol or daily living, daily routine. This was the work of my officers who helped me to do that. I don't think there were too many disciplinary problems. It was bound to happen, things like smoking. Vietnamese people were very fond of smoking and when it was prohibited, another thing – rightly or wrongly, you may know better than me – a Vietnamese man is really a 'man'. The woman is secondary. So the man doesn't do anything and lets the woman do everything. So our police, or our staff, were very justified when they would say 'let your wife walk first and you follow'.

Vietnamese men are more... in public they are the boss. And Vietnamese people, when they arrive in a large family, they have many children. And the men walk in front, and his wife will carry two big baskets, and a line of little 'ducklings' follow behind. So actually, we treated them very gently, calmly. And there was no offense. But sometimes, you just correct them in a nice way. So eventually when they are classified, and received by the US, or Northern Ireland, England etc. So they have to send a plane to arrive in Hong Kong and pick them up. I treat them very well, the twenty truckloads that arrived in Kai Tak. And I organised them like boy scouts going camping, you know. 'Number one, number two...[laughs]'.

**I: Which camp did you control?**

MPL: East would be under the control of the Prison Service. North was Red Cross.

MPL: I had very few contacts with the volunteers, because I was busy enough. They had different ways of treatment, like, 'you can come and go'. They had no contraband, prohibited, etc. You can bring in cigarettes, and they don't care. But we cared. Because, number one, we don't want the contamination of the air, we don't want fire hazards etc. And sometimes, you know, even if they were provided with food and everything, it was very troublesome. In Hong Kong, what is the biggest bakery? Garden. Perhaps the Hong Kong Government purchased from them [Garden] loaves and loaves of bread. They were treated so nicely, overprovided [with bread]. Sometimes the refugee people would start to sell the bread outside Garden bakery. Garden bakery provided them free bread, they get overprovided the bread so they have leftovers so they set up a store outside Garden to sell bread.

MPL: Talbot Bashall should know best. We had Northern Ireland taking about 50 of them. They had a plane arrive. Nobody wanted to go on the plane. These were the English men, and Talbot Bashall – he was British – said, 'I don't blame them, I wouldn't go to Northern Ireland either.' Because of the IRA, political situation and the cold. So we don't blame the people, as long as they were safe and came back and met the schedule [in the camps]. If they stayed overnight... as I said, the Vietnamese people had large families. If they had five children, labour-efficient, they would find a job outside. You know the psychology of the refugee people, they have to keep some money. They came out with nothing, and they go to the States, they want to start with something. So when they leave, they would carry big cassette radios, and some of the ladies would dress up nicely. We had trouble getting them on board aircraft, because they would bring so much luggage with them.

**I: What were some of your fond memories of your two years with the Vietnamese refugees?**

MPL: I had a couple of very musical families. They were received by the Canadian Government and were assigned to Ottawa. They couple and a brother and sister were really, really musical. The sister was a violinist. Quite young, about 15. And her brother was 13. First-class pianist. And when they were landed, when their plane arrived, I picked up the violin and played 'Oh Canada'. That was their national anthem. And people were really cheerful.

**I: How long have you been living in Toronto?**

MPL: 32 years.

**I: Have you met any Vietnamese who were refugees in Hong Kong?**

MPL: Oh yes, there are many. When I left Hong Kong to go to Toronto that was in 1980. Whitehead hadn't even started yet. Because the third influx, as they called it, hadn't even started yet. So that's why Bonnie only has something to do with the refugees because she came up to headquarters and was assisting the Commission when the Vietnamese boat people [came]. The first experience that Bonnie Wong had was Kai Tak East, when she worked with Garth Heiss. I took over from Garth Heiss.

Two weeks later, they mentioned a number of riots. I was confronted with the first riot, when Li Kwan Ha was Commander. We worked together. There were not many, about 2000 in Kai Tak. And one of the reasons we got away from that was because we controlled [the situation] and finished it very peacefully. Because the complaint was that the United Nations was too slow in screening [the refugees]. And people got frustrated. That's why animosity shifted without good reason.

**I: Since you were living in Toronto, have you met any Vietnamese refugees who passed through Hong Kong?**

MPL: Probably many. When I go to the restaurant, I don't have to wait for a table. They call me [speaks Chinese] Camp Commander. I got a good table [laughs]. I met many of them. They were quite well-off, you know. I met a young man who worked in a restaurant and I chatted with him, and he said he was in Kai Tak East camp. And his daughter was now learning ballet, and he speaks French. When the Vietnamese boat people were screened, they took people who spoke French. Being bilingual – speaking French and English – was an advantage to being selected to go to Canada.

**I: Did they recognise you or did you recognise them?**

MPL: They recognised me more than I recognised them. And there were so many of them. And then the brother and sister who went in Ottawa, they still send me letters from Ottawa. The violinist. And at one time, people gave me a newspaper cutting. I don't know their name you know. But they sent me a cutting and said they were from Hong Kong camp and they became brilliant artists. That was a long time ago, 1983 or whatever. In actual fact to tell you the truth, I went to Canada purely because I worked closely with the Canadian Government. At one time, at the end of '68, Ottoway gave the Hong Kong Canadian Commission that within six months, they had to screen and accept 10,000 refugees. How can they do that in six months? If you just simply take at random 10,000 it's easy. But they had to screen them for the best. The second best would go to Australia or somewhere else [laughs].

So at this time there was this commotion at the camp, and you were bound to have trouble. Even husbands and wives may... [be separated]. At one time, we closed the camp for a little while. The Canadian Commission in Hong Kong was trying, saying 'how can we meet the target within six months if you close the camps?' I said, if I go back to the camp and send you everything you require? And I did. I said I was going on leave, but I couldn't finish the task in the six months. I needed another two months but I was on leave. But I couldn't go on leave, I had to finish the task.

MPL: I said eventually if you receive 10,000 refugees, what about receiving 10,001? They asked who was that one? I said me. That was the truth. So when I left Hong Kong to go to Canada, the Hong Kong Canadian Commission gave me a souvenir. I thought it must be a million dollar wallet. He gave me a booklet on Canada. I said, 'what a cheap photography book'. It was a limited edition from the Queen. It was signed, saying 'thank you very much for assisting with the refugee program'. I can still make a copy of the handwriting and send it to you.

**I: I guess Canada was very good to take 10,000. They knew they had to work fast to get the best.**

MPL: Yes. So I'm partly responsible for assisting with this.

**I: The other Governments ended up taking [less than the best].**

MPL: You know that's why people who work in the ivory tower... many people would ask, 'why would you leave Hong Kong when you were Acting Commissioner?' I was bound to be Commissioner. Bonnie Wong was my student. All these people. I don't know why, at that time I had the opportunity that the Commissioner simply signed me up. And then, my children were studying in the UK. At that time, when you worked for the Hong Kong Government, your children were eligible to send your children to the UK to study with an allowance. But you have to send them pretty early, at the age of 11 and 13.

My wife was not so happy about that. And very often when you send your children to the UK to study, they don't come back. We know about the return of Hong Kong to China. But if Hong Kong stayed as it was, as a British colony, you would never see your children again [after they would study in Britain]. So that's why we went to Canada, to bring our children there. So my son eventually became a dentist in Toronto. We were happy as a family unit.

**I: Looking back, what did experience working with the refugees mean to you?**

MPL: Honestly, I put a lot of effort into the refugees. The refugees were not only a group of people who earned sympathy and affection from another group. It is a worldwide sympathetic consideration. And therefore, in my position, apart from the policing of prison control, I was seriously involved in a Christianity business. And I am working very closely with the Methodist Church and another church. And we organise activities. So I treated it as something different from the prison world. It was a social service. We talk about prison work, rehabilitation etc. Well I have nothing against that, but rehabilitation is a beautiful word. But to tell you, criminals may not be easy to change. It depends on the criminality and his nature. Some people can never change. If someone who was arrested and has a nice character and if something that he falls into – some difficulty – you can release him in two days and he can become a good man. And even for homicide cases, it's very emotional. And sometimes, you kill people, not with premeditated arrangement, planning. Then he has no criminality, you can release him. You cannot release a convicted murderer, a criminal. But usually these are the people who make a good opportunity for success. Not petty theft. Petty theft becomes occupational. How can you change them? But I am all for the belief [in change]. But it's a long way to go. It's human.

But so far, back to your question, I really enjoyed the time when I was working with entirely different from what eventually happened... when they had the third influx. I had never heard of them, it had become a sizable problem. And honestly, with people who work in the prison service too who knew me, because in man-control, the personality of the person in high command is very important. Now, during the time when I look back on the number of people, I knew them all. But it became so violent. Honestly you see so many weapons there. It's humiliating. It shouldn't be there if you have good control. Another thing, purely personal, if you find in that area they put so much above the [speaks Chinese] tactical unit. I have written correspondence with Tom Gardener when he left. In my correspondence, I said, the tactical unit should not be in prisons. The CSD tactical unit. Not the police. Now sitting in an ivory tower in Security, in our situation, in our operation situation, we are not in hostility with prisoners. We are treating them well, educating them and helping them to rehabilitate. If there is something serious, we just call the police. Tom Gardener fully agreed with me. I have a lot of correspondence with Tom Gardener after he retired.

MPL: Because our role was not to just 'police'. We lived it... that was my philosophy...

**I: Is there anything you'd like to add?**

MPL: I just hope that now this situation with where Vietnam is concerned goes back to normal. Many people are going back to Vietnam which I think is a good thing. It's a situation which has solved by itself. Because there is no other country that can help another – it's your own people. And what other thing did I learn from the Vietnamese boat people? [speaks Chinese]

**I: I did not get to record your name and birth year?**

MPL: My name is Pak-Lam. Family name, Mak. The Honourable Mr Mak.

**I: And what year were you born?**

MPL: I was born in Hong Kong. I was 'made in China'. 1953. No, 1933 [Laughs].

**I: I thought I could get away with that. Thank you very much.**



## M. Huynh

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Interview date: 25 Oct 2017  
Time: 11:50 am  
Place: Residence in Amersfoort, the Netherlands  
Name: M. Huynh  
DOB: 20 Oct 1958  
Huynh left Vietnam on 23 Nov 1978 from My Tho

Total 19 people, including 5 children. The boat was 11 m by 3.5 m

Huynh said that once in the ocean heading to the international water, they saw many merchant ships. However, they tried to avoid these ships because they were concerned that if they were rescued, they might be taking back to Vietnam.

After 30 hours at sea, a Norwegian merchant ship picked them up. The ship captain told them that he knew that there was a very large storm coming and when he spotted Huynh's boat, he did not think that this small boat would make it. Thus he sent a cable to his government to ask for permission to rescue these boat people.

These 19 boat people were transferred from their small boat to the merchant ship. They were given food, clothes and

about 30 hours later, they were taken to Hong Kong (HK).

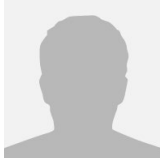
After arrived in HK, Huynh and his group were placed in the very first refugee camp established at the old British military base. Huynh describe life in the camp as 'great'. The camp was very big and had many empty spaces, since there were not that many refugee arrivals during that time. Each person, including children, received HK\$8 per day, which Huynh said was more than enough for everyone to eat well. They were free to leave the camp anytime they wanted and they could easily find work at factories or in small businesses nearby.

Huynh's first job while staying in HK was mechanic at an automobile garage. Later he worked at a small manufacture, running metal cutting machines. About a month into the job, Huynh had an accident, which caused the loss of parts of his two fingers. Huynh spent a month in the hospital. Two months later, he was run over by a taxi and his leg was broken, which sent him to the hospital the second time. During his 4 months in HK, Huynh was in the hospital twice for more a month and a half.

Around the time when Huynh and his family were about to leave HK to resettle in the Netherland, he witnessed the arrival of the Huey Fong that carried more than 3,000 Vietnamese. Huynh revealed that the treatment of VBP started to change, for instance, the rules about movement in and out of the refugee camp was stricter, and that the refugees were required to carry ID cards when they leave the camp.

Huynh noted that at that time that the government staff were friendly and the HK people were kind and helpful. The UNHCR even allowed them to use a large room to hold a farewell party whenever refugees were leaving for resettlement in another country.

Huynh said, "I really appreciate the British HK Government. They embraced the VBP and my family and treated us very well. Comparing HK to my country, it was like two different worlds. I felt very lucky!" Huynh further recalled how he and his family were forced out of their own home and sent to the New Economic Zone by the communist government, where they barely survived.



## Paul Lok

Interviewee: Mr Paul Lok (PL)  
 Interviewer: (I)  
 11:00am, Tuesday, 8 January 2013, Hong Kong University

### I: Could you please state your name and place of birth?

PL: My full name is Lok Wai Kang, Paul. I was born in Hanoi, Vietnam on November 15, 1944.

### I: How long did you live in Hanoi?

PL: I left Hanoi after 1944, then I came to Hong Kong with my parents.

### I: When did you get involved with the Vietnamese boat people situation?

PL: All Immigration offices were involved with the Vietnamese boat people from the very start. This was after the influx of refugees. After the illegal immigrants from China. We saw displaced persons from Vietnam [coming] in small boats now and then, after the early 70's. So very early [on] in my career. I first worked in the harbour section, now called the Hub Division. We went to clear immigration at the anchorages. Boats coming into Hong Kong would have to be cleared by immigration, customs, port health etc. Port Health had a designated place – we called it the 'anchorage'. They had to drop anchor there and wait for immigration clearance before coming into Hong Kong harbour. The first contact that I had with the Vietnamese boat people was the time when I was working at the harbour section. At a very early stage.

### I: Do you remember what year, what month that was?

PL: They came in, now and then. Throughout the 70's until, as far as I can remember, the Clara Maersk with 3700 people. I was there at the time. I was drafted into the Operations team.

### I: What department were you with at the time?

PL: I was working as a Training Officer for the Immigration Department. I remember that was the time when the Queen visited Hong Kong. And that was a difficult time, whether Hong Kong would have to abide by the refugee convention and let people off the boats, disembark and land in Hong Kong. At that time, there were two groups of people working on this. And of course, there was a group from London as far as I can remember. I was drafted as an operative to a company by the Deputy Director of Immigration to work out, in conjunction with my colleagues from different divisions of the Immigration Department, an operation order. This was to prepare for the landing. I mean, letting off the refugees on board to Clara Maersk. The ship – I can't remember the name. And how to process these 3000 odd people. It was a hectic time.

We had to work within a very short period of time to work out the security procedure, the processes themselves, and the identification of each person and to group them in families. [That is] as a family unit, in a comprehensive way. That was a very hectic operation order. Maybe later, you can recover the operation order on Clara Maersk. The landing place was in a terminal in Ta Mun. A container vessel terminal in Ta Mun. At that time, that was a new terminal. We needed such a processing place, large enough to go through all the steps. That was for the policy branch to decide. It was later decided that Princess Margaret Hospital – that was a new one at that time, ready to be used – was the [processing] place.

As far as I can remember, I was the assistant to the Deputy Director in charge of the operation process, who went

through each division, organised to cope with the landing. There were several designated places. The police, the CS (Civil Services) were responsible for disembarkation. Police were responsible for the transportation to Princess Margaret Hospital. According to the chart outputs procedure, they would have to be searched upon landing, disembarkation from the ship, then [sent] to the Princess Margaret Hospital. That was their first stop. It was already a mess, you know. One lorry contains about 50 [refugees], and they just don't know where is their children, where are their [family members]. But we still have a holding place if they have these sorts of troubles, to wait for the next lot of people to arrive. To try and get their family together.

Then, we go through the identification step first. This is a step that is very important. We've got to know which is which, and who is who. We took photographs of them. The instant camera photograph. Mother, father, grandfather, all of them were taken together. No names yet. Each of them held the photographs themselves. They then proceeded to another point. That was the point they had to tell their names, their family background and attach the photograph to be certified. This was the proforma for a person declaring themselves as such. The names and family tree, etc. With all that, we tried to ensure accuracy.

There was false presentation and people not telling the whole truth and all that. But that would be sorted out later. Then, with the identification paper, they would have to proceed to another immigration section. That was the immigration process part. We had to reconfirm the data and tell their stories very briefly. How they boarded the vessel, where they're from, their original place of living in Vietnam, who organised them and all that sort of investigative statements we would want to have from the person themselves. This forms a very important, fundamental paper for the later screening process and distribution of persons to different names camps in different locations.

### I: Who was the Deputy Director?

PL: Mr DC Radman. Then, you could see that the procedure was planned and organised [by us], and was fundamentally to care for two important elements. One, security. We don't want any confusion or [anything] unclear, arguable things that could develop later. This included corruption allegations. So we have each division or processing point with a person in charge of the total operation of that section. Then finally, back to the Immigration headquarters.

We had an officer at that time, who was the Chief Immigration Officer – Jim Murphy. And a Senior Immigration Officer, Gordon Chu. I was a Training Officer, leading a class of about 18 – 19 trainees. My class and I were drafted as a group to follow-up the whole procedure. And to deal with the aftermath, resettlement, liaison with consulate staff – all these liaison work. The policy side were still with the Security branch. Negotiation between States and countries still continued, but we had very good contacts and communications. We trained consulate staff and operatives. Gordon Chu was my Head. We worked very closely [together] at that time. Gordon Chu is now in Vancouver, Canada. Basically, that was an overview of the '75 Clara Maersk landing. I will now tell you some stories.

PL: As I said, identification from the ship was a mammoth task – this was as far as I know, because I was accompanying the Deputy Director, I was having all these 'little [chats]' all the time. Before landing, the ship on Clara Maersk was run by different factions of people [refugees]. On different parts of the ship, [the refugee factions] were running the ship on the stern, the bow, the engine room all had 'figures'. Actually, a faction of the crew leaders were very influential persons. You must know that at that time, who were able to board the Clara Maersk were either military, the society people and mainly the rich. So, there were lots of them allegedly buying their trips. [Lots of] organised crime, even on board the Clara Maersk. So you can imagine, disembarkation of these people – 3700 [of them] – could be such a mammoth task.

You may have the second family in front of the boat. But you were on the starboard side. So when you are disembarking from your section, you have still your family left on the ship, governed by a different faction of people on the other part of the ship. There were situations such as this. When we started searching initial identification of the refugees, there was a lot of chaos. Lots of yelling out, this and that. We had a different [disembarkation] place for that purpose. Regarding disembarkation, who were they? We don't know. But somebody on the ship knows. They have their [own] name lists; they know how to share the benefits afterwards. We don't know. That was the organised part of it, as far as I was told. Very difficult.

On searching, we experienced funny things, interesting [things]. Somebody had nothing at all. Just a small bag. There was nothing. No weapons. The main purpose of searching was, of course, [to find] weapons or any other harmful things. There was nothing [on board]. They grabbed the bags on their waist. We tried to see what they were holding. Nothing. Then later, we found a gold bell. Painted in bright paint, but actually it was gold. We saw also a small child holding onto a bottle. [The child] never let it loose. At the bottom of the bottle, there were gold leaves. It was funny. There was lots of gold. Later, you will find this out from the archives, how much gold there was accumulated and



identified and discovered. And later they can exchange it for money in the camp. And they even cut themselves open and inserted gold leaves into their flesh. And bound themselves. All sorts of funny things they concealed.

**I: So when they cut themselves open like that, was the wound raw when you searched them?**

PL: Yes. That's why we had the hospital premises for these people who went there in the first instance. If there is any sickness, wounds to be treated, we had immediate medical services accessible.

**I: Who made that decision to use the hospital at that time?**

PL: We don't know. Who makes the decision? I think probably, someone at a very high level. But it was already very well built. It was built to be used. We didn't know at that time. All we knew was that this was a sick person. We had to categorise who needed immediate care, you see. That why we had processes and procedures to arrange in such a form. So we can identify people at each point for security reasons. And safety as the second reason. [A] Supplementary reason. M. Davis was the Head of Security at that time. So, this is the human side of it. And all sorts of crime, [false identification issues]. But during the whole procedure or process, we had at least the chance to regroup them as they claim to be [in family groups]. For that to be verified later. And that would serve as the basis for camp arrangement and accommodation. That's the landing part.

**I: May I interrupt you? I thought the Clara Maersk picked up refugees straight from small boats? But it sounds like they all embarked on the same boat all together?**

PL: That was yet to be verified. You will see later, all the big boats bringing in lots of refugees. Hundreds, thousands. The Skyluck too was picking up little boats on their way.

**I: I'm aware of the big ones coming in later – Skyluck, etc. I wasn't aware that the Clara Maersk was one too. From the press, what I've got so far was that the Clara Maersk came with 3000+ passengers rescued at sea from small boats in distress. So that's not the case?**

PL: That was yet to be verified. And people may believe in that, but as I myself... You see, if they are not organised, you won't see these people in such a [form]. They are rather on the upper hierarchy in [Vietnamese] society. To think, within four months they were ready to be accepted elsewhere. Very quickly. I mean, the resettlement country who were willing to help, because first, they are well-educated, basically. Some were very rich. Really very rich. And some are military. So they are more readily acceptable [to be resettled by other countries]. So if they were not organised and picked up, you can imagine one small boat can carry less than twenty refugees... if there were 3000 refugees, would you be likely to encounter so many small boats at sea? So, I myself for one don't believe in that [idea]. You know every ship has a logbook. I don't believe the logbook statement. But the truth will never be known. If people are willing to, really, tell.

Different people telling different things at different times. We don't place too much importance [as this is not all that relevant]. And then, all that really matters to Immigration is that they are not picking in people to their family which was not their [original] family member. That can be [considered] a corruption practice you see. This is more important to Immigration and a resettlement program, and we have got to safeguard that. To the very last. We were not that easy to believe in their family tree. They provided them to the camp, or consulate later, which was different from the family tree they gave us on landing. So we need clarification and all this elaboration, confirmations etc. before we amend our record.

My team – I was an operative Training Officer at the time, drafted through the refugee team – took charge of the 18-19 students of my class. Our response was, one record-keeping. Record-keeping is very important as I said. Accuracy and integrity. The second part was to organise, liaise with consulate staff to select the refugees that prefer for settlement in their country [of preference]. That was a very, I mean, we needed honest people [to undertake that task]. We need clear records which we can say that we are reasonably confident in. At that time, my team and Gordon and Jim Murphy were trying to do this. To protect the refugee acceptance country, as well as my Department's integrity.

**I: I assume that you conducted the interview in Vietnamese for those who couldn't speak Chinese or English. How did you find interpreters?**

PL: That's the interpretation part, a very difficult part. At that time, there were not many Vietnamese-speaking Hong

Kong people that we have confidence to allow them to be interpreters. And we didn't have many interpreters. We had to rely on our judgement within the group. I mean, firstly, the faction leaders will not be interpreters.

**I: So you mean you used the refugees themselves, those who could help with interpreting?**

PL: Yes. We needed people with an educated background, i.e. some were teachers from a middle-class background. But then, when they moved out from Hong Kong elsewhere, we were in trouble. Then the Security Branch came in and advised that we should establish recruitment teams for interpreters and selection from Hong Kong. But that was later. For Clara Maersk, we didn't have too much of a problem. For interpretation. The stories they told us, it was very fundamental information that we required. Of course, their backgrounds weren't being investigated into. That much, we know only a fraction of it.

There are still people in Hong Kong who might find it useful to have much more information i.e. Police Department. They are also [responsible] in moving and finding information that may be of interest [to them]. And then, people from the consulates. They will surely find out much more. And Immigration does as well. Immigration will try to pick up much more personal information, [such as] their background information, political, social etc. Because they have to work on resettlement programs.

**I: So at what stage was your responsibility with the Clara Maersk finished?**

PL: I almost finished a year and a half. Then I handed over to somebody else. I continued my part as a Training Officer, because I got promoted to lead a class of, well, University Graduates, Immigration Officers, direct recruitment.

**I: About the refugees on the Clara Maersk. After you disembarked and created their files and handed them over to other Departments, did you continue to work with this group?**

PL: We don't hand it over to other Departments. The Immigration record will never go out. Then, Gordon and Jim Murphy worked together with the consulate staff, and let them go to the camps. There were three camps – one in Harcourt Rd, where the Supreme Court now is. Just next to the Supreme Court, there was a garden. Harcourt Gardens. It was a camp. Harcourt Camp. The other camps were the new territories. One in Fan Ling and one in Saigon. That was it. Three camps. There were more than those... Corrective Services (CS) helped with managing the camps. It was very different from later on when it was less numbers and the CS team were in charge. The resettlement side of it – they first came to us. Then we provided them with a data form. And they initially go through the data form to identify who they want to see. And we arranged for them to go to the camp, accompany them to the camp and introduce them to their 'family' through the camp manager.

We started their resettlement process and visa [arrangements]. I still remember there was one very interesting case. During the whole process, we met small kids. Clinging onto adults as [if they were] their family member. It could be so, but they are still orphans. I mean, children without parents. Because, at the final stage of verification, we identified they belonged to the same family group. When we questioned them, they had to tell us [who they were]. [Some would say] 'They have given me the children to carry over to Hong Kong'... actually, the child's parents were still there [in Vietnam]. We don't know. For these orphans, we had separate lists. 'Not verified lists' for [these] children that we handed over to the consulates. [Stating] these children may not be a family member of this particular family [as identified]. When we interviewed them, we could select them together [with their identified family]. They may be connected, but actually, we don't know. We can't be sure of the parents, you see? Quite a lot of these children are in such a position.

There was one very interesting [case]. Nobody claimed anything on him. He was such a jolly kid, who ran around. He was about 9-10 years old. Running around, very cheerful, not knowing anything. I mean, pretending not to know anything. But when we grabbed him and tried to talk to him – you know, tried to understand who this boy belongs to – it was so funny. Nobody knows him. Then, I vaguely remember that at the corner of the ship, this boy sat with a group. The groups said to me, this boy is the 'hawker'. He is selling things, along the beach. [Laughs]. And when everybody was jumping up on the ship [in Vietnam], he jumped on the ship as well. Carried on selling [things] to us. It takes about a year and a half for the consulates to decide [what to do with him]. Because nobody knows where his parents are. And he didn't know himself. He was just a 'hawker'.

**I: At the end, he went somewhere? Did anybody adopt him?**

PL: I don't know. But I think the accepting country put him in a certain 'group', that they were willing to care for him.

**I: It was interesting you mentioned about some of the infants, where the family claimed the infants belonged to them. What made you, in the first place, think that was not the case?**

PL: Well, [laughs] that's the instinct of an Immigration Training Officer. When there were people coming in front of you, and you look at them, there are certain instincts that you will have to make an assessment on this person in front of you. Try to put appropriate questions [forward]. So, it's not too difficult for Immigration Officers on the frontline to do that. The process goes through all the chains, so you would probably know that different stations would have different spots that alert Immigration as a whole, of the group. Such as, 'who are they?' 'What to do with them?' Basically, we would have a certain picture of the group.

**I: What were some of the highlights of the second time you came back in 1979?**

PL: Disembarkation was completely different that time. It was even less well-organised. Because on the part of the second phase of the influx, there were some big boats coming in with thousands [of refugees]. Actually, we had no time to go through all these organised landing processes. They were a couple of them of the ship who were making a fuss out of the scene. I'm sure the Security Department; including Marine Police etc. would have to deal with safety rather than security in the first instance. Ok, let me tell you about the night before the arrival for Hai Hong.

Hai Hong was a much organised trip. I was working as Assistant Principal with Tom Peters. Gordon wanted me in again. I was in charge of the coordination centre of the Immigration Department. We know the ship was coming into Hong Kong and we worked very closely with Hong Kong police, not Marine Police. There was a superintendent called Linus Long King. We worked very closely, to chart out when this ship will arrive and how we would deal with it. He got a piece of information that there was a Hong Kong man who was the organiser of this boat who worked within Immigration. [To check] movement records of this person – actually there was three of them, i.e. did they leave Hong Kong and where did they go. The first arrival after Hong Kong was Bangkok. Then they go from Bangkok to Phnom Penh, then Vietnam.

We made all these movement records, checked them for about six months. How many trips they made, etc. From Hong Kong. We tracked the movements of the organisers. We worked for about 24 hours on the whole set of movement. We looked to see their Vietnamese network in Hong Kong. That was the part before their arrival. So, how did they organise the disembarkation? Of course we had no Princess Margaret Hospital environment, so the procedures were not very perfect, to our desired standards. There was one good point. The Police team, having Immigration records of their spot man. When they first boarded the ship, I was one of the first ones to board at the time, to get alongside the ship.

Firstly we wanted to board the ship by helicopter. But later it was decided by the Security Branch that this was too dangerous because of the size and marks of the ship. We took the first police launch, the very big one, and berthed alongside and boarded the ship to have an overview of the ships' size and how they placed themselves and tried to identify the organiser who was pretending to be one of the Vietnamese refugees in vain. But it was a brief time. Only now, we determined who is taking charge of what part of the ship. And we had to do the process all over. And during the process, we were able to identify the Hong Kong guy.

We were happy the Immigration team kept a record – not just the movements, but the identity, [so that] we could recover the central records. I mean, records of the documents issued, i.e. passports, certificates of identity, any related records of these people. We had the photographs of these people, and we were happy. And then, Linus (Police Chief) did the rest of it. The Police team found gold in the Engine Room. Lots of it.

**I: Something like about a million dollars' worth?**

PL: More than that. And individuals carrying gold, unknown to us.

**I: So what happened to those Hong Kong men [the three organisers]?**

PL: You know, in the Immigration section aiding and abetting entry into Hong Kong illegally is a chargeable offence. So we charged [them].

**I: Did you deal with those three individuals personally?**

PL: No. In Immigration, we have a Prosecution section. [Also] An Investigation section that works differently. I was in Controls. Let me tell you about [the] organisation. The Immigration Department handles all the personal details

from births to deaths to marriages. We issue identity cards and travel documents. [This is in] The part we call the Documents division. We have Physical Control divisions – airport, borders etc. That covers Physical Control. Then we have Investigation divisions – outside investigations, internal, and prosecution. Mainly, that was how the Immigration organisation [functioned]. Then of course, we had Administration which included personnel, human resources, training, internal affairs and management audits. There was an internal audit department. I've gone through; I myself have worked there about two years internally, in auditing etc. The Immigration worked within the three divisions.

**I: Without a hospital facility, where do you disembark them?**

PL: That was the difficult part. We had a ferry. You still remember if you have been to Hong Kong before the ferry, the Yamati ferry, the vehicular ferry. A double-decker. It was quite large.

**I: I saw a picture of that.**

PL: You can imagine how difficult that was. We had to convey batches of refugees to a big double-decker ferry. That ferry was like the camp.

**I: So firstly, you used that as your office, to process them, and then kept them on it afterwards. How many of those ferries did you use, or do you have?**

PL: At least four, as far as I can remember.

**I: So how long did it take you to do the disembarkation process?**

PL: Under the legislative powers of Immigration, we had 24 hours to examine, detain a person for examination. We had another 24 hours to process before making a decision whether this person would be repatriated, removed or else. We had, legally, under the law, 48 hours solid. So we tried to make good of this 48 hours. Not easy.

**I: So you mean you signed a waiver for them afterwards?**

PL: No. So if you needed longer, you would come to the Security Branch [for the waiver to be signed]. But very rarely did we sign these.

**I: Under the circumstances, did you get an extension?**

PL: We would have to trouble Security for that signature for further detention. So we tried to avoid that. They were busy enough to look after these trivial things. I mean, processing was actually a very basic, administrative duty. We would never allow that escalated to Security level. We tried to finish it [ourselves]. 24 hours is the International Law for detaining and questioning people. Beyond that, we were very reluctant to extend for further detention. Because the longer we detained them, the longer we would be infringing upon Human Rights [laws]. More than that, they applied for Court. And even worse, we had a very difficult time.

PL: Perhaps we should say something about the third disembarkation. Skyluck was the third disembarkation. Immigration couldn't do the processing before that. It went to Lama Island and there were 2700 of them all over the island. Marine Police were responsible.

**I: How did you disembark the Skyluck?**

PL: There was no disembarking. The ship just simply ran aground.

**I: In terms of processing them?**

PL: Well the process goes like this. First Marine Police would have to [run them out], then put them somewhere. We asked CSD to open up Chi Ma Wan prison for holding these guys.

**I: How did you handle that? How different was that from the other [previous times]?**

PL: We had no staff as we did before with Clara Maersk . We had difficulty in determining how much work [was required]. When the ship went ashore, the Security Branch decided they couldn't handle the situation, as it was such

a mess. Firstly, we had to round them up. I mean, this was the fundamental [things]. We didn't know who was on board, or how many, and whether this was a true figure given out by the captain. You can't just believe in that, you see. First thing was to go to the island. Luckily by that time, [the] Hong Kong people all knew about refugees and could identify the refugee people for the Government. Of course, it was easy. To group them, CS put them into bunks and tried to manage the camp as far as possible. This was the only place available for any purposes.

At Chi Ma Wan, there were two camps – the upper and lower. And they were put in the Upper. Afterwards, the Immigration Officer organised an Investigative team. It was not as organised as the first time. If you are comparing Clara Maersk with the Skyluck, remember Clara Maersk existed at a time when there was 3000 or so, on one ship. But when you are dealing with the Skyluck, there were 60,000 [refugees] in addition to the Skyluck in Hong Kong who kept on coming at the rate of 500-1000 [refugees] a day. We were completely stretched, and could only get minimal staff from here and there. We could only provide a very brief operational order. We would order them very quickly, 'emergency-style'. There was no more staff available. Don't forget there was a resettlement program going on [in the background] and the 'ECVII's' were still arriving to be screened. I mean, to differentiate [between] them, to determine who was who [was very difficult]. People were telling lies all the time.

**I: And where did you keep the ECVII's?**

PL: They came mostly later, after Skyluck, and they were kept separate. Once we identified them, they were kept separate. First of all, they were not given refugee status and not transferred to refugee camps. They were in fact kept in prison, under Immigration detention. This was until they were repatriated back to China.

**I: Physically, where did you keep them?**

PL: In prison institutions all over, in Victoria prison. They were treated like any other Immigration detainees. For normal Immigration detainees, we normally kept them in Victoria prison, right in the heart of Central. But because there were so many of them, we probably shunned them off somewhere else. But they were never in open camps. Once you let them into open camps, you can't find them ever again.

**I: So the problem of housing these refugees was just too difficult, for both the refugees and the returnees? I'm talking about housing these Vietnamese people, accommodation for them.**

PL: That's another big problem. Remember I was actually drafted for this purpose. I was doing something else, then within 24 hours reported back to Security Bureau. I reported back on the afternoon of the day when Skyluck beached itself. It was my lucky day.

**I: So in the end, what are all these experiences mean to you?**

PL: When you spoke about the ECVII's – we called them Illegal Immigrants (II's) We tried to move them out as quickly as possible. As my boss remembered clearly, we even repatriated these II's by train. I organised that one. And we worked 24 hours throughout the day, picking up these II's from different prison camps, including Collinson, for females, and bundling them in accordance with the farms. These farms were where they belonged to before arrival in Hong Kong.

In a group of certain numbers, in accordance to the normal release. In accordance with the carriage, the number of the carriage (train carriage). Because they dropped off the carriage to one farm, then to another. That part of Immigration duty... [laughs]. My boss knows this well. We worked 24 hours, throughout. Trying to organise [things]. Putting them together, knowing where to pick them up in the prison and when the train would arrive [at the] Hong Kong border. We tried to put the batches of 'II's' to the right carriage. That was a huge ... [task].

**I: Last question. After all this, what does this experience mean to you?**

PL: [Laughs]. Very interesting. I must say that I've been very lucky. And of course, at the same time, very sad to go through all these processes. I was most thankful to my boss at that time in the Security Branch and my boss in the Immigration Department. We worked very closely [together]. And I was sad because that was my prime time in life, to see all these sad things. Human, sad things. Sometimes it was very sad. I know their lives in the camps in Hong Kong, in the open camps, not in prison of course, they were well-organised in prison camps. In open camps, their lives can be very difficult. There are Syndicates in the camps. Sometimes their lives were mutilated by their faction leaders. Syndicate leaders. These were in the open camps. In closed camps, there were fights all the time. This was usual, for people who had been through the war, for Vietnamese fighting the Chinese, the French, themselves.

**I: You said in the open camps, sometimes it was more dangerous?**

PL: Yes, sometimes. I think so. You will find more interesting stories from a camp resident elsewhere.

**I: Thank you very much. Anything else you would like to add?**

PL: No, sorry my memory seems to be failing me.



Paul Wong



Interviewee: Paul Wong (PW)  
Interviewer: (I)  
3:00PM, Saturday September 14 2013, Paul Wong's restaurant in Hong Kong

**I: Thank you for giving me this opportunity to speak with you as a Vietnamese boat person in Hong Kong.**

PW: It's my pleasure.

**I: I'd like to ask you when you came to Hong Kong?**

PW: 1989.

**I: Did you come by yourself or with your family?**

PW: With my family.



**I: How many of you [were there]?**

PW: Four people; my mother, father and one younger brother.

**I: And how old were you at that time?**

PW: About seven years old.

**I: Could you please state your full name, your date of birth and where you were born?**

PW: My name is Paul Wong. I was born in 1981. My parents are Chinese and were living in Vietnam. In 1979, my parents went back to China from Vietnam.

**I: And where were you born?**

PW: In Guangzhou.

**I: And when you first came to Hong Kong in 1989, where did you end up?**

PW: Tai A Chau.

**I: How long did it take to get to Hong Kong?**

PW: By boat, two weeks.

**I: How many people were on your boat?**

PW: Thirty.

**I: Was it a big or small boat?**

PW: A big boat.

**I: How was the journey? Was it dangerous or scary for you?**

PW: Very dangerous. The boat was broken because there was a hole. All the men used to wake up at midnight to bail the water out.

**I: Did anyone on your boat get hurt or die?**

PW: No.

**I: How many children were on the boat?**

PW: 8 or 9.

**I: Were you scared?**

PW: Because the ship was very unstable, yes.

**I: Did you know where you were going? Did your parents explain it to you?**

PW: My father told me we were coming to Hong Kong.

**I: Did you have any expectations of what it would be like when you came to Hong Kong?**

PW: I didn't really have any expectations or images, but my father told me that when we came to Hong Kong, everything would be better than China.

**I: Was it better when you first came?**

PW: The conditions were very bad [in Tai A Chau].

**I: Were you surprised when you were in Tai A Chau?**

PW: Disappointed, yes. They needed to make up their tents themselves and they actually lived on a farm where there were [crops] being grown, a chicken.

**I: And how long were you in Tai A Chau?**

PW: Only 15 days.

**I: And during those 15 days, what did you do?**

PW: Actually we were quite free to do anything we wanted to – we could go fishing and catch fish, and we would have to cook our own food.

**I: After those 15 days, where were you moved?**

PW: Green Island.

**I: How was it like in Green Island?**

PW: Like being in a prison. Just like being in a prison, we could go the playground but would need to be back by 5pm to be locked up in the hut.

**I: So when you were outside from 8am – 5pm, what would you do?**

PW: So most of the time, we mostly played basketball and football. And my father would give us private lessons under the trees. Just teaching us simple mathematics.

**I: Did you get to learn English? Were there any other people coming from outside to teach the children?**

PW: Later, there were some [English teachers]. [This occurred] in other camps.

**I: What about the food?**

PW: There would be food cooked in big quantities.

**I: Did the refugees cook their own food or did the camp management do it?**

PW: The refugees weren't allowed to cook [their food] themselves, unlike in Whitehead [detention centre]. It was not good, [the food] as it was just boiled in water.

**I: What do you remember most about Green Island?**

PW: My father giving us lessons.

**I: Were you scared in Green Island?**

PW: On Green Island, because the people who had come weren't staying so long, there wasn't much conflict there. But at the new camp, Hai Ling Chau and Whitehead, I could see that there was more fighting and this made me and my family scared.

**I: How long were you at Hai Ling Chau?**

PW: About half a year. When I asked people – because they knew some people working in the office at Hai Ling Chau – when I asked my friends why we needed to move on and off, we were told that the camp management didn't want us to settle down, become friends and then perhaps form gangs and create a conflict of interest.

**I: What was the difference between Green Island and Hai Ling Chau?**

PW: There were more trees inside the camp, but at Green Island there were more trees outside the camp. At Hai Ling Chau, we could have green trees and gardens inside the camp.

**I: How were you treated differently by the camp management?**

PW: In fact, the management didn't bother to control us or interfere with the refugees much. If someone were drunk, and made some chaos, the camp management wouldn't tolerate that. For some people who were drunk, they would have made homemade wine inside the camp. For those who made the wine, they seldom drank it themselves but would sell it. My father wasn't a drinker and he seldom drank.

**I: And after that did you move to White Head?**

PW: About 2 years in White Head. We stayed in Whitehead for around 2 years.

**I: And was that the last camp?**

PW: After 2 years, we moved to High Island again. For one year and then went back to Whitehead.

**I: For how long?**

PW: Half a year, and then to Pillar Point. Also I was screened as a refugee so he could leave the detention centre and move to Pillar Point.

**I: And how long were you at Pillar Point?**

PW: For around two years.

**I: And was that the last camp?**

PW: Yes.

**I: And when did you leave Pillar Point?**

PW: Around 1996.

**I: Could you describe your life to me in Whitehead and Pillar Point?**

PW: The best thing was that we were allowed to cook for ourselves; there was a classroom so we could go to school. My father was one of the teachers at the school and he taught Chinese and mathematics.

**I: What were the living conditions like at the camp?**

PW: In Whitehead, we still needed to lock up during the night-time. But I remembered the best thing was that we were allowed to cook and we also had a lot of relatives who were granted refugee status who had been overseas for many years. We were frequently visited by our friends and relatives at that time in Whitehead. I still remembers they [the relatives] would come and bring us gifts. Metal wasn't allowed, but he was allowed tiles, toothbrushes and pots and pans.

**I: And did you witness any riots or fighting in White Head?**

PW: Yes.

**I: Could you describe that to me?**

PW: Normally they would use metal they had cut from the fence, or the metal water pipe. They would even use a toothbrush, just like in a movie.

**I: The Vietnamese boat people would use [these weapons] against whom?**

PW: They were usually drunk; most of the time they were drunk and would fight.

**I: And would they fight against themselves or the camp management?**

PW: Normally when they fought [amongst themselves], staff weren't involved [in the fight].

**I: Did they [the refugees] ever fight with the [camp] staff?**

PW: No.

**I: So [fighting occurred] just amongst the Vietnamese people?**

PW: Yes.

**I: Did you or your family ever feel unsafe or in danger when they lived in the camp with violent people?**

PW: Yes.

**I: Did you ever get hurt?**

PW: Mostly it was the young adults [fighting]. The boys my age didn't fight.

**I: I mean did you feel threatened by the adults or 'big brothers'?**

PW: My father was in his thirties but because he was one of the teachers, the other refugees respected teachers very much. So when people saw him, the others in the camp were also good to him and his family.

**I: I heard the conditions at Pillar Point were very bad; did you feel the same?**

PW: When I was in Pillar Point, there were some drug addicts and it wasn't very good. Also, there were two groups of people – the Vietnamese and Chinese. And I was quite scared going through the main gate because some drug addicts would gather at the main gate. But after I had stayed for some time, it got better.

**I: Were there any significant events that happened at any of these camps that you remember the most?**

PW: When I was in Ghuangzhou, the environment where my family and I were living wasn't bad. But when we came to Tai A Chau, we had to live in a place where there was a lot of rain and also there was thunder – it was very unforgettable.

**I: After you left Pillar Point, where did you and your family go?**

PW: We rented a home in Tuen Mun.

**I: But you were given refugee status. Couldn't you choose to go and live in another country, or did you choose to remain in Hong Kong?**

PW: We had applied to other countries but we were not qualified so we had to stay in Hong Kong.

**I: So when they left Pillar Point, were there still a lot of people left in the camps?**

PW: Yes.

**I: Because I heard that in 2000, the Hong Kong Government gave residence to all of those [refugees] remaining at Pillar Point. But he left in 1996 so I wonder why [he wasn't given residency]?**

PW: To my understanding, if you moved to Pillar Point, your basic living [needs] was provided. If you could support your basic living [needs] you could rent and leave at any time. So for our case, we had refugee status and my parents were working on construction sites for several years. After they could save [enough] money, we could go out to rent our own place.

**I: So they were not forced to go back to Guangzhou because they had received refugee status?**

PW: Yes [that's correct].

**I: What was the first major difference that you experienced after you left the camps?**

PW: After I left Pillar Point, I felt free. What I meant by 'free' was that there was no more fence. Everywhere there was a fence, even at Pillar Point there was a fence. So when we came out, whatever unit we stayed in had no fence. That was the biggest difference. Also, when I left Pillar Point, I started to work in a restaurant as a waiter.

**I: I'm very emotional because I understand that for most of your childhood, you were surrounded by a fence most of the time.**

PW: In every camp, the fence was very tall so I couldn't see the outside world. The only one time when I went to High Island and I saw the outside world through the gap between two metal panels of the hut. And [it was] my first time seeing a car – a vehicle.

**I: So when you were inside looking out at the car, did you dream someday you would be out there driving the car?**

PW: Yes.

**I: And when did you become a chef?**

PW: When I came out from Pillar Point, I still went to school and worked part-time in the restaurant. But I liked cooking very much. So around ten years ago, I finished his Form 5 [education] and the results were very good. But one of my teachers knew he liked cooking very much, so he introduced me to the restaurant school, and I took a cooking class to start my career. So I went to the chef training school for two years, and then I graduated and had a chance to work in a restaurant in a big hotel. And that hotel was called the Excelsior.

**I: And why did he like to cook so much?**

PW: It is in my genes. My father also liked cooking very much and he ran a restaurant in Guangzhou in China. I also have very high standards about food. So I think I got the genes from my father.

**I: Do you mean that after living in the camps with the horrible food, you still have a high standard in food?**

PW: I don't think it was because of the bad quality of the camp food. When I as very young, I thought I would be a chef one day. So when I was in Pillar Point, I had a chance to go camping one day. And I volunteered to be the cook [during the camping experience].

**I: You were born to be a chef...**

PW: So when we went camping, the other guys would go hiking [and other activities]. But I would have to look after the fire and prepare congee early in the morning and for dinner. So every time I would be looking after the cooking and I also caught fish and crabs.

**I: When you were in the camp, did you ever picture what life would be like outside the camp?**

PW: The only thing I thought about was freedom, and not being inside the camp anymore.

**I: You said the first time he saw the car was in High Island. So when you were living outside, how different was it?**

PW: When I went to Pillar Point, there was a special ID – special identification. That ID wasn't a 'real' Hong Kong ID, so when they used that ID to find a school for me, it wasn't easy. But luckily, they found school for me run by a Christian church. And I was very happy there.

**I: Are you still in touch with some of the friends you made in the camp?**

PW: Most of my friends were from Pillar Point. I didn't have many friends in the detention centres; none of those friends kept in touch.

**I: So when they got together, do they sometimes talk about the past?**

PW: In the first few years we did talk about the camps, but in recent times the main topic [of conversation] is about our kids because a lot of us got married and having kids. I have two children; my eldest daughter is three years old and my son is six months.

**I: Congratulations, so you now have a new kind of meaning in life. So now when you look back to the time when you were a refugee in the camps, what did that [experience] mean to you?**

PW: I think that those few years in the camp – it doesn't matter whether it was in the detention centre or in the open camps at Pillar Point – it was a positive [experience]. Because if my father didn't bring us to Hong Kong, survive the dangers in the sea and in the camp, we would still be in Guangzhou like everyone else. I overcame a lot in my life and is much more mature. When I was in Secondary School, my teachers always thought that I was ten years older than all the other students. I believe this experience has given me very good training in facing challenges in life. The best thing is that every problem has a solution.

**I: That's a very great way of looking at life. What do you think you would be doing now if you were in Guangzhou?**

PW: Maybe I would have adopted his father's business and would be running it in Guangzhou. But it would not be as challenging as my restaurant here. For this restaurant, I am one of the shareholders and my dream is to one day run my own restaurant which will be much bigger [than this current one].

**I: I wish you a lot of success and wish for you to achieve your dream soon.**

PW: Thank you.

**I: Did you do any drawing or artwork when you were in the camps?**

PW: I drew and played in the band.

**I: Are you still playing in a band?**

PW: I met my wife in 2002, and I remembered at that time until now I hadn't played the drums. I met my wife in Hong Kong.

**I: How are your parents?**

PW: Before I was married, I lived with my parents. My parents are now living in Tuen Mun.

**I: What about your brother?**

PW: My brother got married and moved out.

**I: What does he do?**

PW: [He works] in home decoration.

**I: Thank you, I am very inspired by you [and your story].**

PW: I went back to my old Secondary School to give a talk to the boys and encourage the young people to face their difficulties with a positive mind.

**I: I left Vietnam by boat when I was 16 and my journey was very dangerous as well. Four people died and we ended up in a jungle in Indonesia. I was there for ten months before I went to America.**

PW: Any further questions?

**I: Is there anything you want to share with me?**

PW: In fact, the living environment now – the space for living – [can be a] problem but it's not something big [in the scheme of things]. If you have difficulties, you have courage to deal with it. And every difficulty is a chance to move up. For example, with a restaurant, I have a good team in the kitchens and the waiters etc. to help me. I am lucky to have found the right person to do the right job [at the restaurant]. Even when it is very stressful [working in the restaurant] I feel lucky to have the help of my brother and he sets aside time to plan for the future i.e. how to upgrade. I also told my wife that even though the restaurant isn't very big at the moment, they can expect more [growth] in the future. And when I was with his family in difficult times, we lived simply, and it wasn't a big deal.





## Prof. Penelope Mathew

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Occupation: Freilich Foundation Chair, The Australian National University  
Born: 19 January 1965, Boston, USA  
Resides: Canberra, Australia  
Interview date: 24 August 2013, at Australian National University

**Q: Please tell me of your experience working in Hong Kong with Vietnamese refugees. When were you there and why?**

A: I was in Hong Kong for 12 weeks from May to August 1992 – just before I go on to do my graduate study at Columbia Law School in the US. At that time, the Jesuit Refugee Service had set up a project where they send volunteer lawyers and interpreters to assist Vietnamese boat people in the camps in Hong Kong. And our job was to explain the 'refugee definition' and to listen to people's stories and to talk to them about the fit, or lack of fit between their story and the refugee definition.

"Because it's not enough to just want to move somewhere if you're applying to be recognised as a refugee, you have to show that you have a well-founded fear of being persecuted of one of the five reasons, which are – race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion."

**Q: What made you interested in that job?**

A: I'd begun a little bit of work on refugee issues and with refugees. I think my interest was really sparked by a conference that was organised by Professor Jillian Triggs, who is now the President of the Australian Human Rights Commission. She organised a conference about refugee issues in our region. And as a young lawyer, it seemed this was the perfect area of Law for me because it involved people, it gave me the opportunity to help others and it involved a really fascinating interplay between International Law and Domestic Law.

I'm quite interested in International Law because you see the politics behind it quite plainly. I'd also begun to

volunteer at what was then called the Refugee Advice and Case Work Service. So I have begun to work a little bit with refugees myself. And I will never forget the experience of interviewing someone who was a Somali, and was looking to find his mother and family members. And I could see that this man had been through a lot. There were physical marks of scarring on his face, and he really knew a lot more about the whole process and how to do things and what to tell me, and what was relevant about his story and why him and his family were refugees. And it was shocking. It was shocking to listen to what had happened in Somalia and to him and his family in particular.

I think most people who work with refugees have those moments, the first time you hear someone's story you can't forget it. And once you've realised the reality, I don't think there is any danger of you thinking that you have to stop the boats, or anything like that. You understand that this person needs to be dealt with compassion. So I had a little bit of experience, but I must say my knowledge was more theoretical than practical. But by the time I went, I'd grappled a bit with James Hathaway's work on the refugee definition. And I had a very good sense of how Human Rights was important to the Refugee Convention. And I can remember very clearly interviewing a young woman who I suspected something dreadful had happened to her because she was a woman. We were just on the cusp of recognising that women can suffer particular forms of harm, rape, for political reasons and so on. And can be vulnerable in a way that sometimes men are not. And I was able to write up the notes and say that I think this woman probably has a claim, based on the fact that she is a young woman and doesn't have protection in Vietnam. And I am pretty sure she was successful in her claim for refugee status.

**Q: Sometimes when you hear dreadful stories like that, it would make you either want to stay away because it is so hard, or it would encourage you to do more, what was your case?**

A: It has encouraged me to do more, but I must admit I became an academic for all sorts of reasons. I thought I might be a good teacher. I liked the idea of being in the University and being able to acquire more knowledge but also being able to use that as the base for some advocacy work. And I think I have managed to combine that successfully.

I haven't done a lot of the face-to-face work with clients. I think that kind of work would be incredibly draining. Because you're hearing about people's pain and suffering all the time. Sometimes you're dealing with stories that maybe very tragic, but don't quite fit into the refugee convention. And you have to say to someone, I don't think your claim is a very strong one. Sometimes the wrong decision gets made, and someone that you think is clearly a refugee gets determined to not be a refugee. So in some ways, I think I can cope with it better because I am dealing with it at a more intellectual level.

**Q: What was your day-to-day work with the Vietnamese boat people in Hong Kong like?**

A: We worked in two of the camps, Whitehead Detention Centre and Tai A Chau. We would go in each day and we would interview maybe five or six people, and spend around an hour with each person. And of course you've got your interpreters for who this is a really exhausting day. They're sitting there trying to listen to the story, and they're trying to translate for both the lawyer and explaining to the client as well. It is a very long and exhausting process. Sometimes really emotionally draining because of the kinds of things you are being told, some are quite horrible. With the young woman who I think something dreadful had happened to, she was not able to tell me about it. I knew there was something else going on. She was crying but she couldn't actually tell me. Which is very typical of a person who has been through a sexual assault, they can't actually tell what's happened to them.

"And in some cases, there were things that had happened and you could see that someone's life wasn't really good but they didn't really fit into the Refugee Convention and you're having to explain to them about that, and that's really hard as well."

**Q: What are some of the responses that you remember when they were told they didn't have a case?**

A: I can remember a young kid who would have been about seventeen, and he was an unaccompanied minor. And he'd been in detention for about three years. I found the idea that we would have children in detention quite shocking. He told me a story about his father being through re-education for many years. And I listened to what he had to say, and at the end of it, I had to say to him. "I think that because of the low level of his rank, I believe that he went to re-education camp, but I suspect that he may not have spent quite that amount of time. And if Hong Kong Immigration Authorities don't believe that part of what you're telling them, they're likely to disbelieve everything else. And so, I understand that this means you have a weaker claim for refugee status, but on the other hand, if you're not telling the truth and Hong Kong Immigration Officials feels that you are not telling the truth, they are just going to

deny you refugee status anyway." That was very difficult.

At the time, I can remember this young man saying, "thank you, you've helped me make an important decision". I don't know what that decision was, but I remember seeing him subsequently, and I think he had managed get some alcohol, and he was quite inebriated, and I suspected that was how he was coping with this pretty awful news. Because what do you do then? What decisions do you make? Do you go back home? I understand that for a lot of people, there was this issue of losing 'face' if you went back home. And, this was a dreadful situation and there isn't attention, having to cope with all of this on his own, while locked up in a detention centre. So those were very hard things to deal with but they taught me a lot I think.

**Q: What was the average success rate while you were working with them?**

A: It was pretty low. Refugee status determination under the whole of the comprehensive plan for Indo-Chinese refugees, that there were fairly low rates of recognition. There was a sense that this is so much later than the fall of Saigon, are these people leaving for economic reasons, because we've been re-settling all of them. So "is there a pool factor?"

I think there was an element of compassion fatigue, and countries in the region were sick of dealing with it, so they wanted to have a process for determining refugee status. But I listened to claims that were all over the place. There were people who were very clearly refugees with a fear that something would happen to them. And there were others where it was a pretty weak case.

**Q: Did you get to go inside the camps?**

A: Yes. I went in every day. We actually worked inside the camps.

**Q: Could you describe the conditions of the camps?**

A: I can remember very clearly, walking up to Whitehead Detention Centre on my first visit, and of course you can see that is surrounded by razor wire. I had visited a prison previously as a Law Student – I had been to Prentidge prison in Victoria – so I knew what a prison felt like. But it's still very confronting, when you come to a place where there are human beings being locked up behind very tall fences and razor wire. It's very, very confronting.

I was also hit by some kind of smell. I think that because it was very hot and you've got a whole lot of people crammed into this site, so it had a kind of peculiar smell- I can't quite describe what it was – but it was just a sense of a whole lot of bodies being in the same place.

Whitehead was a very forbidding kind of detention centre. It looked a bit like a concentration camp, I thought. It had these things that were like bunkers. Like airline hangars for planes with three stories in them, covered with corrugated iron. And every family might have a couple of square metres of space basically. They might rig up some curtains to give themselves a little bit of privacy, and they'd have all their belonging hanging from plastic bags from the tops of the poles from the bunk bed arrangement.

I used to look at them and think 'how on earth can you live like that, it must be so stressful'. Most of them were there for a few years, and you're thinking, how can you bear it? How can you stand it? You're locked up and you can't go outside, and your living space is so confined.

I have to say though, that I admired the asylum seekers. Most of them were trying to get on with life in some way. And so they would do things like organise English classes and they had a little Non-Government Organisation that would come in and run schools for the children. They were trying to have as normal a life as possible as they could under the circumstances and I just thought, 'you're amazing'. To me, it proves how wonderful they would be as citizens, because they were so resilient. I kept thinking, 'if it was me, I'd be in a foetal position on the floor somewhere, just unable to bear it', and thinking 'why is this happening to me?' And here are these people just getting on with life. I really admired them.

I'd like to say though that it was interesting to compare the Whitehead Detention Centre, which was run by the Hong Kong Correctional Services, and Tai Chau Detention Centre, which was run by Hong Kong Housing Authorities. Tai Chau is an island, and so there wasn't quite the need for this strict security, and so people could actually go to the beach and they could go fishing. And I have these amazing pictures of people using anything they could – sometimes their clothing – to catch fish so that they could cook them later. And they'd have a swim. And that was much better. And they also had a few industries – I think they made bread at Tai Chau. And we used to actually come in at the

weekends, and we'd often stay the nights. That was quite amazing, because when you stayed overnight, you would see more of the activities that were going on. And some of the markets that they would run. So there was this whole kind of life, and Tai Chau was a much more pleasant place than Whitehead, which was really every foreboding, very prison-like. And it used to worry me a lot because they had a lot of children there. And I kept worrying about these children who wouldn't be seeing any trees, an greenery, all they would be seeing is this corrugated iron and fences with razor wire and I thought this can't be very normal, even though they did seem pretty normal. The children used to hang around outside the door of our interview room in Whitehead Detention Centre and at lunchtime they'd want to play.

**Q: What do you think about detention?**

A: Well I'd already made up my mind that detention is not a good idea. I thought, 'how do you justify particularly prolonged periods in administrative detention for people who haven't committed a crime?' I understand when someone first arrives and you don't know who they are, and you don't know if they pose any threat to your community, there can be a power to detain someone to check out their story, to make sure they are healthy, they're not carrying some kind of disease. I don't have a problem with that. But the idea that you can detain someone simply because they are seeking protection as a refugee, and that you will continue to detain them until their claim has been determined, seemed to me to be wrong.

And I was disturbed by the conditions as well. I didn't see how the conditions were really humane, given how crowded it was. And how little privacy people had. And I'd heard too that it could be quite dangerous. I mean I never really saw any evidence of that. But, I knew that women had been raped, I knew that there had been violence, I think at some point there had been things that were burned down, accommodation burned down. And I think that's what happens when you put people in a pressure cooker environment like that. And of course you will have some people who are not very nice people; you might have some criminal elements in there who are prepared to do things. And I don't think the conditions met international human rights standards either.

**Q: Do you ever think that the condition was intended to discourage people to stay longer and volunteer to go home?**

A: That is a tough question. I know that towards to end of the comprehensive plan of action, there were things done – I think quite deliberately – to encourage people to go home.

**Q: What did the experience mean to you?**

A: I still think of the experience as one of the most meaningful jobs I've ever done. And it wasn't even a job because I wasn't even being paid. But the opportunity to use your knowledge in a way that was empowering to people, so that they actually knew what the process was going to be, what the law said, how what had happened to them fitted with that. It was a very wonderful experience for me. That sense of being able to help someone else. I learned a lot from the Vietnamese boat people. I learned about resilience. That people can get through amazing things and as I say, I really admire them. So I do carry that experience with me.



Peter Choy



Interviewee: Peter 'PT' Choy (PT)  
Interviewer: (I)  
3:00 PM; Friday 4 January 2013  
Cosway Bay, Taahan Road, 'The Elegance' Building, First Floor.

**I: Could you please state your full name and birth date?**

PC: I am Choy Ping Tai Peter. And I was born in 1945 on December 29th. And I joined the Immigration Department as an inspector in 1966. And I was finally promoted to Deputy Director when I was retired after some 34 years in the Government.

**I: Where were you born?**

PT: In Hong Kong.

**I: What year did you start to get involved with the Vietnamese boat people?**

PT: As far as I can remember, that was about 1986.

I firstly took up the post as an Assistant Director and my job was to, well, when people are suspected to be Vietnamese people, we determined their status, to see whether they were really genuinely people from Vietnam. Or some people maybe, we called – 'ECVII' – those who have been settled in China but found life difficult in China but they come to Hong Kong and have a strong knowledge of Vietnam and know the language, they can easily pretend to be from Vietnam. And they are also Chinese as well, posing as Vietnamese.

After their status is determined, we found them to be Vietnamese from Vietnam, we authorise a detention in the camp. And then they are in a cube, waiting to be screened. Their status is to be determined. Whether they are a refugee or non-refugee.

**I: How do you determine if they are Vietnamese from Vietnam? What were your criteria?**

PT: We have entry condition given to us by the UNHCR. Up-to-date information about Vietnam. Even news from a week ago, and we try to ask questions to determine their place of domicile to see whether they speak [the language]. We have Vietnamese interpreters who can even tell which part of Vietnam their language is from. And sometimes we make mistakes. People who have been to China for two-three years may easily pose themselves as a Vietnamese and pass our tests. And we put them in a camp and later, when we go through a more-lengthy interview, we discover he or she is from China and has not recently been in Vietnam. And the most important thing of our work is status determination. It's to determine whether they are refugee or not.

**I: So are you saying there are two different screening processes, the first one is whether they came from Vietnam or China?**

PT: Yes

**I: And once they have been determined to come from Vietnam, you have to determine whether they have a refugee status?**

PT: Yes. And then they are in a queue, and they wait for two to three years for their interview, or if their applications, or status is turned down, they may appeal to a Board. Let me remember the name of the Board... RSRB, the Refugee Status Review Board. It is a separate entity appointed by the Government, with a Judge to be the Chairman and Officers assisting the Chairman.

**I: What was the longest time a refugee would stay until their status was determined?**

PT: I would say it's about 2 to 3 years, or slightly more than that.. At the beginning of the exercise, it took longer time. But towards the end, it comes quite fast. I mean, in a way you don't have to wait for 2 to 3 years.

**I: For those waiting for 2 to 3 years, they were in limbo right?**

PT: Oh yes. As far as I remember, I faced one dilemma. Some of these boat people who had been in Hong Kong before this exercise of determining status was launched; they had been detained pending repatriation. And they lodged a case to the Court. Some of these Human Rights solicitors made up a case, and some representative cases, and they said they had been detained for too long a time. Because under Immigration Law, we have a particular section there that [states] we can detain a person, pending his or her repatriation. That took a very long time. Maybe sometimes, when the receiving country delays that he or she is a citizen, [for example] he or she is a citizen, we don't know where to send them back.

They say they have been detained for too long and they lodged a case to the Court. At that point in time, there were thousands of people being detained in the camp. And the Court went through, finally, the initial Court, then Court of Appeals and Court of Final Appeals. The Court of Final Appeals ruled that it is not legal to detain people for so long a time, without providing work for the people, they don't have proper education. The particular date when the Court ruled they should be free, it was chaos for the Department. We suddenly had to [include] a line that people detained for more than 2 years – I forgot exactly how long – were to be released from detention. At least to release about 4000 people.

**I: What happened to them when you released them?**



PT: I was the so-called Director of Office. The detention was authorised by me alone. Only myself have the authority and all of a sudden, they had to be released. We cannot just release some people. Take for instance, a family. The husband and wife and the daughter arrived four years ago, and recently about a year from now, and then, the aunty took a little girl claiming to be a daughter of this family. And then they have an aunt who is a sister of the, say, wife. And we have to determine when we draw a line three years, we have to release people who are similar, who are in a family group. So it took me a long time. I mean, overnight, people started ringing me, or attending the office to say – ‘this one should not come as part of the family to be released’. It was chaotic. And it took me overnight until early morning to clear.

Some of the cases were straightforward; it may just be a husband and wife or a single person. And some are very complicated. There was an old man who claimed to be the mother of an aunt of ... (laughs) of ...but you have to take into consideration the human factors. And then, we called and released some of these people to the open camp. From the open camp they can go working, or go schooling in some of the aid schools.

**I: When you say they stayed in the detention camp for too long so they appeal, how long was too long?**

PT: Well I forgot because I have been retired for so long. They particularly drew a line at 3 years, maybe 2, years. There was a line given by the Court. Not to people that were freshly arrived. They can be detained. But these people waiting in the queue to have their status determined, some of them their status is determined and they are not refugees, but the Vietnamese Government refused. The refugees cannot find their census papers, their belongings, their place of abode in Vietnam. And they did not have the right to return. So we cannot repatriate them.

**I: When you said there were 4000 of them to be released, how long did it take for you to clear them?**

PT: Well that was overnight.

**I: Overnight?**

PT: Because the Court of Final Appeals ruled that these people should not be detained anymore. And after this judgement, they were to be released as soon as possible.

**I: And when you say ‘as soon as possible’, you mean 24 hours?**

PT: Well, we take it as we have to be most diligent. I mean, to work to release them.

**I: So how long did it take you to clear 4000 of them?**

PT: Well for the straightforward cases (a single, straightforward family who claim to be related), about 15-20% are more difficult cases.

PT: A family claiming they have a sister who is not mature, who is under the age of 10 or so to be the wife, who recently arrived with another family or so... Well, I had to sit there the whole day with people coming to me with their files. I was supposed to be the judge who determined who should be released.

And I said, ‘OK, the little girl should be released with this family’. But even if I make mistakes, the little girl was detained. It gave us a lot of work because they were not together, and some of them are released to a particular camp. Later on, some people claimed to be (close) relatives of people who had been released and appealed to us to also be released. So the whole week was chaotic?

**I: So you are saying it took you a whole week to clear them?**

PT: In fact it took us about 24 hours to release all these people. Because, before the judgement was handed out, we foresaw such a judgement, maybe, and we have done preparation work. But this preparation work is not always fool-proof, not water-proof, we have to be doubly careful when we actually release people.

**I: When you say release people, do you organise spaces in other open camps for them?**



PT: Oh yes. That is the job of the Security Bureau and the CSD (Correctional Services Department). They suddenly have to open some of the camps from closed camp to open camp. And the facilities are different.

**I: So what was your Department?**

PT: We determined who is to be released?

**I: The name of the Department?**

PT: The name given to the CSD, who tried to transfer them from closed camp to open camp.

**I: No. The name of the Department where you were working? Were you Immigration Department?**

PT: Yes. And, finally when we have finished off this status determination process, a lot of people appealed to the RSB. Our job was to present the cases before the Board, and provide a representative to the Board, as to why we judged this people as a non-refugee. And sometimes our decision was over-ruled, and sometimes they agreed. I was the person who approved who is a refugee [or non-refugee]. We had a lot of cases that were made-up cases. I can still remember, say, people claiming a father who was a policeman or soldier, or people who has applied fresh meat or vegetables to AMCAM or so, people who wrote long stories – 10 pages or so – I had to read up on their stories to see if they were qualified.

All of these cases, some of these were determined, you remember, 'Oh this one is very deserving'. On a particular day, you see an identical case. How come? I have seen such a case about two weeks ago? Then I start asking my assistant for the file and I relook at the file. How come the two stories can be so identical? I tried to check up their location or place of detention. In fact the one who determined to be a refugee was transferred out of the camp, and before he was transferred, I realised it must be a made-up story. I re-interviewed him again, as he seems to be telling the same story as this one who was screened. The interviewee cried and said, he was coached by somebody who was screened and that's why he told the same story. And in fact, he said he started to tell the truth and his own story. An officer was supposed to be very skilful said that 'yes, we agree this story is true'. And this story was even more deserving. Finally, the one who told his own story passed the examination. A lot of these cases.

After all, they determined their status determination process was in fact taken simultaneously we organised this orderly repatriation scheme. We called it 'ORP'. It was supposed to be orderly, no force was used, and they were supposed to walk on the plane themselves and walk off and to step out and walk down the staircase themselves.

**I: But in reality they didn't.**

PT: In reality they didn't. As far as we can remember, the Vietnamese Government is always objective to people being carried down the staircase. They said that it was disgraceful. When they returned to their own country, they would walk down by themselves. If they are carried down, they will not accept them at all.

**I: So what did you do in that case?**

PT: We have to wait and persuade. But you can never ... you have to wait, sometimes 2 hours. I can still remember a funny situation. There was in the summer when outside temperatures in Hanoi were about 40 deg C, very hot day. But again, in the flight, the air conditioner was on and people were quite comfortable. Despite the waiting, they felt comfortable in the cool inside. But a police officer suddenly had a funny idea, 'why don't we turn off the air-conditioner? And let them feel the heat? So that they will go down the staircase themselves?' And asked the captain to turn off the air-conditioner. And in 10 minutes, it's beginning to become hot. And in half an hour it is getting very hot. And people who faint, who cannot bear the heat wasn't the Vietnamese refugees. It was the Police Officers or the Immigration Officers. These officers always work in the air-conditioned office. People who fainted or felt uncomfortable was the Immigration Officers and the Police Officers who escorted them. These people when they were in the camps don't have air-conditioners. So even in the heat, they feel ok. Half of the officers had fainted.

That was a joke for us. So it won't work. And we had to go down both of the time.

Every time the receiving Officer from the Vietnamese Government wasn't the same Officer. Not the Vietnamese Officials – we don't have money. But we always have a schedule. Now the same crew, according to Regulations, people who fly a flight cannot work more than 12 hours. So if it takes more than 12 hours, they can't fly the flight

back. We have to overnight in Hanoi. So when it's 10 hours from the time they are on duty, we're getting very anxious. Very excited about people getting rid of these people. And we try to go down the staircase, try to negotiate with these officials, saying 'next time when you come to Hong Kong to try to determine to give re-entry facilities to these people, these people are the same people who occasionally come to Hong Kong to interview the Vietnamese detainees. To see whether they have an abode in Hong Kong.

Say, 'next time you are in Hong Kong, we'll take you somewhere. Have you been to the Ocean Park? Or have you been to the peak? Or have you taken a good meal in Hong Kong, a buffet lunch? Next time we'll try to buy you one'. The most we can bribe them is the Ocean Park because we have a free ticket to the Ocean Park. Because we have waited for two to three hours, we try to go inside to have a rest. In the meantime, we cannot see what has happened. And so we, in fact, the police and Immigration Officers have already identified who is the leader who is stopping people from going down. And the first one we carry by force, or use some force. Reasonable force is to take all these leaders – male, females – take these 'Big Brothers' from the flight downstairs. And then, after these 'Big Brothers' or leaders are gone, then they would quietly, cooperatively go down by themselves.

**I: So every time you have a lot of people to repatriate, you have to go through the same scenario pretty much?**

PT: Sometimes it's very bad. Not very violent, but some force has to be used. Sometimes you have a flight that is very quiet, very peaceful. And you have good luck. So when we are in charge of a flight taking people to Vietnam, you can never know what time you come back.

**I: And how often do you have to do this?**

PT: We take turns. The Security Bureau may send someone (a BS), or we may send an AD or a Principal Immigration Officer, who heads a team. And the most is twice a week. But in the final stage, maybe one or two flights a month, towards the end of the whole exercise.

**I: How many passengers in each trip?**

PT: About slightly less than 200. About 150. We cannot take too many because... We take 100, the Security Officers need to be about 50. Some male, some female.

**I: So pretty much one Officer for two refugees?**

PT: Oh yes. Because there may be some people who are very passive, some may be very wild and aggressive.

**I: So you described the scene of arriving in Hanoi when they get off the airplane. What about when they get on the airplane from the Hong Kong side?**

PT: Oh yes. Formerly, because we had freedom of press, we allowed people – the reporters – to watch or to shoot [photographs]. And we have some monitors, or some people who are JP (in Hong Kong, these are permanent people in the community, Justice of Peace) to oversee the exercise. To see whether force has been used unnecessarily.

**I: How did you get 200 people on the airplane that resisted return?**

PT: Normally one or two days before, we locked them in a particular cell and we do a lot of, say, talking. You cannot get away when you are a non-refugee. If you are not on this flight, you are on the next one. It doesn't make any difference. And the NGO's would try to talk to them a lot before they come, and say 'even if we send you back, we will try to visit them. See whether they have been well received, whether they have a place to live, if they are ok. And the UNHCR will give them an allowance for 28 days and the Security Bureau and Immigration Department will visit them occasionally to see whether they are rightly or properly received back in their place of origin.

**I: When they go back, were they kept in a community area?**

PT: Firstly they go to something like an open camp, a camp provided by the Government. If they don't have a claimed address, claimed house or relative's place to go, then what happens later on will be the Vietnamese Government will ask where they want to go, what friends or relatives they have that will take care of them.

**I: When you or the UNHCR went to visit them, did you go to their houses or the camp?**

PT: Go to the houses. We visit returnees not on the first day or first 28 days on their return. We probably visit them when they have returned back for over half a year, to a year or so. And most of them are ok to be fair. They are ok. Some of them... the return is so smooth, and things are not so bad in Vietnam we should have returned them earlier. Most of them say so.

**I: But usually, when they left, they pretty much lost their homes and everything, so when they returned they must have relied on relatives to get started.**

PT: Oh yes. Some of them may have relatives, most of them do.

**I: So back to the previous subject. When you put them on the airplane, how did that work? You said sometimes you had to apply some force..?**

PT: Yes, but you have to identify during the process of counselling, the NGO or CSD people or ourselves will know who are the people who are supposed to be the leader, who are supposed to be the most difficult person. And then we'll try to lock them up separately to be the last lot. And then, if you have taken their wife and children upstairs onto the airflight, they probably will go out as well. Those people who walk by themselves. As for getting off the flight, we have to take these hard core people first. You have to demonstrate these hard-core people are down already, and they have to walk down themselves or are carried away?

PT: It takes a lot of time; surely, before they go you have to tell them the country condition now in Vietnam is not so bad. You have an allowance. The Vietnamese Government is reasonable now, not as cumbersome as before. You have to talk them through.

**I: What were some of the incidents where people who self-harmed in protest?**

PT: Oh yes. Some of them. But not on the day. Maybe some days before when they are targeted. When they know their name is on a particular flight for a particular date, say a week later. But during the counselling they may show signs of harming themselves. They try, they have no weapon but they can easily sharpen a toothbrush handle, handle of a brush to try and harm themselves.

**I: Did anybody kill themselves?**

PT: One or two maybe, I forgot. Maybe. But not for the reason of repatriation. But when they feel hopeless, maybe they were in Hong Kong for so long a time, some of them may have mental illness or so. People, even people in Hong Kong kill themselves. They work in the bank and jump down from a building or so, because of hard work, illness...

**I: How long were you in this position? How many years did you work with the Vietnamese boat people?**

PT: As Assistant Director, I worked for about 6 years or so. After this particular job, I was promoted to Deputy Director and I oversaw the work as well. Because that was my former job, I paid particular interest. Because at that time, we wanted to finish off by 1997, the return of the country to the Chinese Government.

**I: When did it finish?**

PT: The last camp was closed in 2000. But the majority, 97% of people should have gone by 1997.

**I: But it lasted until 2000 right?**

PT: Oh yes. The last camp was closed in 2000. But the majority, 97% of people should have gone by 1997.

**I: But in 2000 were you still in the job?**

PT: Yes, and other matters as well.

**I: So you were pretty much with the Vietnamese boat people from the time you started until the time you finished working in this department. Did you work in other department besides Immigration?**

PT: Yes. I think the Hong Kong Government and the Hong Kong people have done a lot. I must say I have been to US and I still can remember an incident when I was in Arizona. The daughter of my wife's brother graduated from secondary school and was doing the pre-U (they called it), going to University. I went to visit them to attend the Graduation ceremony. I've seen a lot of her colleagues who are Vietnamese who have done very well, have come first, come second, and gone to very good Universities. I still can remember one or two who went to Berkeley, one to Princeton. Very seldom people can go to Princeton. Oh, not Princeton. One of the Ivy League Universities.

I go to ask them, have you been in Hong Kong, and how did you come to Arizona, USA? Only one said I was in Bangkok, my mother was there with me, and my father died in the war. And one particular young lady said I was in Hong Kong, in 'Whitehead' – I hadn't seen her before. I was glad, I mean, because of such a program, people were educated, become very useful persons. I mean, in the States, in Australia. And your good self [speaks to Interviewer].

**I: So for your whole career life you've been with the Immigration Department?**

PT: For 34 years. Unlike Mr Lai, who is an Administrative Officer, they may serve in many Departments. But Immigration Officers or Police Officers, they are departmental staff of departmental offices. We serve the same department. We enter as Immigration Officers or we get promoted, or we spend our whole career with the same Department.

**I: In your whole career, would the Vietnamese boat people experience be the most significant job?**

PT: Yes. I would say that one of the most meaningful and troublesome [experiences], because so many of them, because we don't have the [resources], the Immigration Department or the Government. Like in the corporate when you are revenue-earning, they will give you more resources. These Vietnamese, we are just doing a humanitarian job. It is sometimes difficult to get resources from the Central Government or the revenue.

We are always under-staffed, and the job is pressing because there is so many of them in detention, people keep arriving, and in between a lot of work, people get married, people who give birth, people who die – you have to register the births, marriages. It's a lot of work. You can never imagine. I mean, besides, our office is in Kowloon and these camps have so many of them scattered all over Hong Kong. We have to go from the office to the camp. It takes a long time. It took us a long time, for the staff I mean. For me it's ok, because I always stayed in the same office. But fortunately, my assistants, my staff have to work hard. I mean, travelling a lot.

**I: What did you mean by 'difficult but also meaningful'?**

PT: Yes. Particularly when you see some of the Vietnamese are successful in the States, Europe, UK – My son in fact graduated from a UK University in London U. He has a university mate who is also from a camp in Hong Kong. He did very well and they met in one of the top Universities. We call this the Imperial College of the University of London. A very good University. He got first-class Honours I think. He was also a Vietnamese refugee and admitted by the UK Government. And of all these jobs, even if they are determined as refugees, some of our work is to escort or to assist them, present them to the Consulate.

This was to take away their 'offense' in Vietnam [he committed some offense in Vietnam], to brush off the bad things and try to present his good things. He was intelligent and young and has two lovely daughters, and tries to present a case. And if they have a bad record, if they are involved with something on the side in the camp, some of the refugees may not be given an entry visa to a particular country and they are stuck in Hong Kong. Some of these refugees, so-called, have never been given a visa for a country. And now in Hong Kong they are doing quite good. Some of them may start a small business, like running a Vietnamese restaurant, or selling t-shirts (Vietnamese t-shirts).

**I: When you look back in those years that you worked with the Vietnamese boat people, what did it mean to you?**

PT: Well, to be an Immigration Officer, sometimes you feel bad trying to separate families, trying to say 'no' to people.

Or, if they spend money, they take the boat to come to Hong Kong, they sometimes have to risk their lives on a boat, sailing for ten days, or twenty days to Hong Kong, they may encounter say, a storm, or pirates – anything. They open themselves up to a lot of dangers, coming to Hong Kong, and yet you have to say 'no' to them, is ... the feeling is not so good. I mean, like before, a lot of China II, from China. Some of them, they are ... and all of these people have to be returned to China. You feel bad, I mean, when you take them to the bridge, ordering them to return to China. And some of them, all of them, they have a very good story. I mean a touching story. And even for these Vietnamese people, all of them have touching stories. Even for the Northerners. All of them are very touching. When you see the file, sometimes, even for myself, sometimes, really, speaking, you have tears talking at some of the stories which are very touching.

**I: Was that the difficult part of your job?**

PT: Yes. I mean, you can see that it is a good part, because you take care of humanity. It is a good, hard job, saying 'no'. I send slightly over half, as determined as non-refugees. Or more than that. Slightly more. So, a lot of people are sent back, are re-located. There may be people who are very successful overseas. There may become triad, nobody knows.

**I: When you hear the words, 'Vietnamese boat people' what comes to your mind?**

PT: I would say it was history, and a good job done by the Government. If you ask me, if there's a war in any other country, which suffers, say nearby Hong Kong, or people who like to come to Hong Kong, as a taxpayer, do you support a Government doing such an exercise again? I would say 'yes'. It's worthwhile. I mean, despite, the UNHCR still owe Hong Kong Government money – running the camp etc. – \$1 billion Hong Kong dollars. That's a lot of money for our small budget. But still, I mean, we have been very cooperative with the UNHCR, they have been very helpful to us and without them, we would not have the successful... in fact, we would have no knowledge of Vietnam. People who were from particular areas of Vietnam, whether there was a military camp or so.

**I: Given the history, would you do it again?**

PT: Oh yes. Well, even as a taxpayer, say, the Government have to pay a lot of money. But we are talking about humanity. That is worth a lot. Even for a particular, say, life cannot be worth a dollar sign there.

**I: Thank you very much, not just for the interview, but thank you for your kind heart.**

PT: Well, without a kind heart (like others) involved in NGO's, UNHCR, you can never finish such a big exercise in Hong Kong. Like Peter, when these people first come and look around places in Hong Kong – Hong Kong is such a small place unlike Australia. You have so many lands, so much ... abundance. Well, in Hong Kong, it is difficult. You have open camp, closed camp. You have to think of providing medical, providing education, most important is this two areas. And also recreation. You can't find these people... Northerners, Southerners. They don't get on. And, without heart, I mean you can never do such a job.

**I: I believe that. Anytime I talk to people like you, I know that if it wasn't for your good heart, you wouldn't last in this job. There is no need for you to work in this kind of environment.**

PT: Now, even if, say, like for myself, I authorised detention and a lot of other things, I tried to determine the status, I spent half an hour (or more) despite I have a lot of work, even if I organise a lot of operations of going and taking people back or receiving people, I still will willing to spend a lot of time looking into a particular case. Seeing and trying to remember details. I try to remember, so that when you see other cases that are similar, or try to determine accurately whether they should be screened in or out.

**I: Was there any particular cases that stood out for you that you never forget? Besides the one you already mentioned.**

PT: I tried to identify two cases of the kind... well this case appears to be similar to such a case I approved two weeks ago. And then, they found the file. And it was the same story.

As a matter of fact, despite the fact I am retired and off the job, I understand that for the Immigration Department, they still have a problem, with Pakistani, or Southern part of India coming to Hong Kong. Sri Lankans, Pakistanis, not Afghans, coming to Hong Kong to be refugees. We have more than few hundred, if not a thousand people still

in Hong Kong. And as soon as they arrive, they are given a paper to wait for a status determination, and then they can go out using this paper and can go out to look for a job. A part-time job or a full-time job. You still have a minor problem. The problem is far less than the Vietnamese boat people. It is still have a problem, but comparing with, well, in fact comparing with Australia; [Australian Immigration Department] is a good friend of ours. I can still remember a few years back when people would come to us and ask for us to help them out with one or two thousand Chinese boat people who have, say, sailed all the way from Jiangxi to Australia, passing through Indonesia to Port Hedland or to Darwin.

Because we have experience, they had in Immigration in Hong Kong, John Williams who came to me and said, 'Oh PC, who should I contact in Beijing as to the re-entry of these people, and how to determine their status and how to get information from them. Can you assist us because we don't have people who speak their language? A lot of dialects in China? And what is the country condition? They don't tell us the name. They try to give us a lot of lies about their name, their place of domicile.' These Australians don't know what is right or lie. [They asked] to help them out, to provide authority to approve right of re-entry or so.

We sent a team of two-three Officers to Port Hedland, to their detention camp, to try and give those lessons on the map of China, the dialects, the census papers, the identity card etc. We tried to give them an idea of country conditions. We always stayed good friends, crossing the border. So, some of us have been to Port Hedland detention centre in Northern part of Australia. Or even to one of those islands... Christmas Islands, also for detention of people trying to go into Australia. John Williams was the state director for WA at DIMA (Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs. He has since retired, and I just had dinner with him recently. He travels to Hong Kong from time to time, and his son works at Cathay Pacific as a first officer... we have become good friends.

Well, we are always proud of what we have gone through [in] this Vietnamese chapter in the Government.

### **I: Any regrets?**

PT: No. I mean it was a lot of hard work. I was the one who organised a lot of chartered flights. It was a lot of money... \$1.35 million Hong Kong dollars from one flight from Hong Kong and Hanoi and back. And we always travelled on the First Class because other people are in the cabin. The leaders tried to help the operation; we'll sit next to the Captain in his cabin.

### **I: I guess there were a lot of lessons learned, especially not to turn off the air-conditioning on the airplane [laughs].**

PT: [Laughs]

## **Second interview**

.....

PT: [PT's boss says to him] 'PT, if you or your assistant go on one of those old flights – people taking people back, the first thing is that if we have a satellite phone, despite you have low-roaming – the last passenger has gone down the flight, you are the first one to ring me up and tell me'.

### **I: So you had to make that call every time?**

PT: Yes. To Brian Bressley. Saying it is ok, we will be flying back in 15 minutes, and it will take 3 hours or so before we land.

### **I: Obviously, over here they were anxious to hear the answer?**

PT: And sometimes, it rained. The Vietnamese Officials are still downstairs, looking, so we cannot take people down. So we had to wait here, it was very hot here. Say, we have to wait, to be patient. To wait for another half an hour. To try and talk. I would try to take them inside and buy them a cake, or buy them a coffee, and in the meantime the Police Officer would take the bad people down.

### **I: So you tried to steer them away so you could do your job?**

PT: Otherwise, it would be difficult. But even for the UNHCR people, they didn't want to see people being carried

down. But they tried to 'open and close' one eye. We always say, the first thing we tell them is, 'The Captain and his crew report his duty at 8:00 today. So we have to be back'.

**I: Did you ever have to work overnight?**

PT: Well, fortunately, there hasn't been a overnight flight who in fact spent overnight in Hanoi airport. It is very expensive. You have to pay for the whole crew. It's very troublesome. You have to pay more for chartering the flight. You have to fly in another set of crew. The present set of crew has to rest for at least 12 hours. And you have to fly in another party of crew. We try to always explain to the Vietnamese Officials... but they say that it is their instruction from the very top. You cannot disgrace our country.

**I: Unbelievable.**

**Third interview**

PT: Because of a riot, people burned down a camp, including the deposit box which you were supposed to deposit the valuables of the refugees. Including say, jewellery, or gold bars. All these deposits are given a receipt with the top of the CSD. And this deposit box was burned down, including all these valuables inside. Some of the gold bars turned into gold balls, sheets. And you cannot identify rings, pearls, watches etc. Mostly, the claims later on were for gold bars, such a weight of gold. Some of them they claimed, they relied on the register of the camp. Because they didn't have a good locker and had their valuables stolen [at the camp]. A lot of false claims made. Maybe some of them were false?

**CH : So when the lock box burned down, how did you settle it?**

PT: I forgot how, because I was then retired. And people made a lot of claims, with volunteer solicitors, and the Government settlement with these solicitors tried to collect their claims and say, 'now no more claims by such a date. Will try to settle. After this date, I will not entertain further claims'.

**I: So the Government had to set a date?**

PT: At that point in time, I was asked to give a procedure, saying refugees will get a receipt, some people came, stating there was a fire etc. I was supposed to make an affirmation to the Court to explain the procedure then. But finally, then, my ex-colleague rang me and said, it seems that the Government has now agreed to settle the case outside Court. And pay these people back. A civil claim.

**I: Approximately how many claims?**

PT: Slightly less, about 50. I can't remember exactly, the correct number after so many years. But the claim dragged on for only about three-four years. They settled the case.

**I: So these people have technically re-settled somewhere else in the world, and they will go back to re-claim, because they have a receipt?**

PT: Yes. Some of them have a receipt. Most of them don't have receipts.

**I: If they don't have receipts can they claim?**

PT: Some say, their receipt has been stolen. They say [many things].

**I: Wow. It's complicated. More and more stories unfold. It's like peeling an onion.**

PT: It's people. And people are complicated.





Peter Lai



Interviewee: Mr Peter Lai (PL)

Interviewer: (I)

2:15pm, November 30 2012, Murdoch University

**I: Mr Lai, thank you for your time and allowing me to interview you. Could you please state your name and your birthdate and your birth place?**

PL: My name is Peter Lai. I am ethnically Chinese, so I have a Chinese given name as well – Heng Leng. I was born 25 July 1951 in Hong Kong.

**I: Could you please tell me how and when you started getting involved with the Vietnamese boat people situation?**

PL: I was first involved in the Vietnamese boat people problem in the middle of 1979. That was virtually at the height of Vietnamese refugees into Hong Kong. I was doing something else at the time and I got a notification from the great management that I have to report back to the Security Branch, which is the part of the Hong Kong Government

responsible for the Vietnamese boat people problem at the time. I had to report back to the Branch within 24 hours because of an urgency for an additional pair of hands to help deal with a large influx of people at the time.

**I: What Department were you with at that time?**

PL: The Security Branch. The structure of the Hong Kong Government – generally speaking – at the time was that you had the so-called policy level where you have different bits of the Government called ‘Branches’. We had the Security Branch, Social Service Branch, Economics Branch and so on. And Security Branch is the branch that is responsible for all aspects of the Vietnamese boat people. Underneath the various branches are the executive departments, which actually are the body of people responsible for delivering services. So, you have departments which provide doctors, teachers, police officers or immigration officers to deal with all sorts of emergency situations. I was posted to the Security Branch at the time. Because of the unique nature of the Vietnamese boat people problem, it was thought that practically, all aspects of the Vietnamese boat people crisis was better handled as a single issue, under Security Branch direction at the time. So we’re not just dealing with the security aspects, but we’re dealing with virtually everything that Vietnamese refugees deal with when they come to Hong Kong – from their arrival to the time they depart. Their initial reception, their housing, feeding them, providing medical care for them, education of the children, making sure that they are adequately documented for the resettlement efforts of the UNHCR and make sure they are housed adequately until their departure comes. And that was one of my responsibilities.

Initially, because of the scale of the arrival, I think the Vietnamese refugees were arriving in Hong Kong in rickety boats and rescued by ships at sea at a rate of about one thousand persons a day. At the height of the crisis at the summer of that year, we had something like 68 000 people – Vietnamese refugees – stranded in Hong Kong at the time. Because of the rate they were arriving, the scale was unexpected. Initially, I was only concerned with finding them accommodation which includes feeding them, medical care and so on and so forth. The rest of the more ‘leisurely’ things like documentation, resettlement and education comes a little bit later. First priority – make sure that they have a roof over their heads and food in their belly. And if they’re sick, being attended to by proper doctors and nurses.

**I: And how did you do that, when such a huge number of people came unexpectedly?**

PL: Well the totality of the Government Departments dealing with all the issues must have been a huge effort. I’m sure they probably involved thousands of Government employees at the time. And in addition to that, many hundreds of voluntary agency workers as well. When we had established these camps for thousands of refugees, initially some of them were run by Government departments until we found voluntary agencies that were experienced in dealing with the situation to run these camps for them. Agencies like the Hong Kong Christian Services, (now Christian Action), Catholic Organisations, Social Service Organisation in Hong Kong, the Hong Kong Red Cross and others. They are, I think, overall better experienced and better equipped to deal with the interface between the refugees than we as part of the Government machinery. They are somewhere, moderating between the individual and the Government so I think it was decided quite early on that although the speed at which the refugees were coming, the Government was the quickest to mobilise, eventually we were envisaging that as far as is possible – and in some cases it’s not – we would handover these camps to be run by voluntary agencies. So, taken together, there must be hundreds, thousands of people involved in the project. Because Hong Kong was a well regulated society and the Government was a well-regulated Government with experience in dealing with the normal business of looking after people, there is an established machinery that although would have to be re-focused to deal with the scale of the problem, nonetheless was able to deal with the challenge because we are a structured organisation. There is no heroics in terms of the efforts of individuals, but it is a really genuine effort on the part of all.

**I: How did you find accommodation for them?**

PL: Obviously, the most readily available at the time would be ex-military camps. Over the years, the British garrison in Hong Kong – Hong Kong was under British administration at the time, until it was returned to China in 1997 – over the years, especially since the mid-50’s, the British garrison has been winding down since the time after the war. And as the garrison draws down in numbers, camps that were used by the British army were left and reverted to us. Luckily, we had a few available camps at the time that were not occupied. So fairly quickly, they were the first line of defence so to speak. And these military establishments included not just camps, but the old royal air force and airfields. Because of the withdrawal of the royal air force, the [Kai Tak] airfield was not necessary. The sole helicopter fleet had left, so the whole of the RAAF facilities was then a very large piece of land on which we built these camps very, very quickly. There are others that were parts of disused Government estate – the wharf – in the middle of the harbour which was a Government wharf. Eventually, the numbers were so overwhelming that we had to make use of existing Government institutions. And by that, I meant for example, institutions of the correctional services

department – then called the prisons department.

We literally had to vacate whole prisons and transfer the prisoners to other facilities, despite the over-crowding. The whole prison was kept for refugees. In addition, we had to build additional buildings within the prison compound to house as many of them as possible. Such an example would be Chi Ma Wan prison. And even then, that's not enough because of the scale of arrivals. Finding accommodation for 68 000 people within a year is not easy. We then had to resort to imaginative measures. We literally rented two multi-storey blocks of industrial estate which was just built and ready to be occupied flat by flat by industries, manufacturing industries etc. We rented the entire building and converted them into accommodation for refugees. Literally we were scrounging around all over. That's how we did it. So part of that was accommodation in existing buildings, part of it was on Government land including land returned to us from disused RAAF airfields and other army facilities and we built these great, big huts for the refugees. We put beds in them. And then when all else failed, we had to rent commercially.

**I: So what was your involvement when you were first called?**

PL: I was first called because of the scale of arrivals. My first and only job I was told was to find some accommodation for them. By that time of course, I didn't start the whole project because they were already halfway through coming in the middle of the year. By the time I had arrived, there is already a machinery setup to deal with the arrival. But the scale overwhelmed everybody and everybody was throwing up their hands and saying they needed some help to find accommodation. And that's where I was directly involved. And people were directly drafted in to do the odd job. After a while, once the numbers arriving stabilised a bit and the building program and the factory rent was on-stream so you could see that numbers were being accommodated, I then became involved in other things like processing them on arrival, making sure they are getting medical care, making sure they had adequate meals and making sure that as soon as proper refugee camp space was available, they were transferred to camps.

**I: What month did you start?**

PL: July. Can't remember the exact date, but in the afternoon when I reported back to the Security Branch, that was the same day on which a ship with 3000 refugees beached itself on the island. And 3000 refugees were spread all over.

**I: What was that experience like for you?**

PL: It was certainly new – it had never happened in Hong Kong. It basically tested our ability to deal with unexpected crisis. Luckily we did have a well-trained force of discipline officers, particularly the police and the Correctional Services Department to handle the situation. The police were called in to corral them, and practically everyone was relocated on the island. And the Correctional Services Department was given 24 hours for the whole of the Chi Ma Wan island were told to put their prisoners somewhere else. We used the entire prison to house these 300 refugees. 24 hours' notice. That's not an easy thing to do. I'll have to say I take my hat off to my colleagues for even just achieving that, never mind how well they did it. It was practically 24 hours a day, round-the-clock operation.

**I: Why did you decide to vacate the prisoners on Chi Ma Wan somewhere else and keep the Vietnamese there?**

PL: Where the ship was grounded was the island. You can see that it is actually pretty close to Chi Ma Wan – the camp designated to house them – was useful, because it was out in a little, isolated peninsula. And it was actually quite a large area, even though the number of building units within there was not that great. So we identified it as a possibility because once you closed off the entire facility and used it for housing refugees, you can then say, let's build additional huts within the same compound. In other, more urban areas – prisons in more urban areas – there isn't all that much space available. Chi Ma Wan happens to be in a rural part of Hong Kong, in a promontory within the peninsula almost all on its own. And there is a lot of land available for that. But eventually we ended up having refugees all over Hong Kong.

**I: Was there a reason why those 3000 people from Skyluck who wanted to land on Lama Island, why were they not transferred to stay with the other refugees?**

PL: They were treated on the same basis as other refugees, but, the rest of the other refugee camps are full! At the same time that there are there, don't forget, there are several thousand refugees in their rickety boats, just arrived within seven days, floating in the harbour in the Western Quarantine anchorage. Some of them, when they arrived in

their rickety, little boats, they had to be quarantined for seven days because Vietnam was a plague-infested area at the time. International quarantine requirements were that they be quarantined for seven days before they could be landed.

And of course, there were some times when even after the seven days, they can't be landed because there is nowhere for them to land. There is no space for them to land. So, if you suddenly say, there are another 3000 more people; you can't just put them in another refugee camp. You've got to put them in a new refugee camp. Basically, anyone that was not in a refugee camp at the time, if they are to be housed in a proper refugee camp, we had to find a new camp for them. We built them, or built new huts in existing refugee centres, or we rented out the factory buildings and every single one was put in new accommodation. Everyone was full.

**I: I thought before the Skyluck landed itself on Lama Island, the people on that boat were not allowed to land.**

PL: They were not.

**I: They were kept in a separate area.**

PL: Correct. There was a bit of 'argy bargy' because there is a degree of suspicion of about what the Skyluck was up to. Why was it carrying 3000 refugees? And at the time, everything was uncertain. And there was the question as to whether or not Hong Kong was the proper place of destination. So they were not allowed to land amongst other things, hoping that they could be persuaded to go to another port, where they were supposed to land. Hong Kong was not the correct port of call. And therefore they were kept on the ships. But by whatever means, the Vietnamese got themselves on the land. It wasn't as if they were being treated differently from the others. As soon as they landed, they were treated as any other. There was no different treatment. And of course there were other ships coming in at the time.

At the height of the small ships arrivals, we had something like 4000-5000 on boats, in the Western Quarantine area, waiting to be landed. If you have a choice, if you land them before their seven day quarantine period, you might run the risk of spreading plague in Hong Kong. If you don't land them, you run the risk of the boat sinking and the refugees might drown. I think at the end, we took the decision that there is no choice. We had to land them, come what may. So we landed them in the dock, at the wharf. Very packed conditions. Because they were still within the quarantine period, we can't allow them to be spread out to the refugee camps because otherwise there is always a risk that the plague will infect others. We kept them for the requisite time. We gave them medical care and food and so on until they were available to be transferred out.

**I: So everybody was crammed on the dock and stayed there for quarantine?**

PL: Some had to stay for a week, two weeks. Some had to stay anyway until we found space for them in the proper refugee camps. It was not ideal; it was certainly not a good place to stay. But you either pick between the devil and the deep blue sea. They are either floating in refugee boats in the harbour, but at least on land they are safe, they are under care, they are being watched by doctors and nurses for illnesses, they are being fed food by the normal standard scale of food in Hong Kong, they have toilet facilities. In their little boats they have nothing.

**I: What happened to the boats once they were quarantined and on land?**

PL: The boats are not seaworthy. They can hardly float. So they are mostly being sunk. You can't use them anymore.

**I: But it was still a task the Government, which is to remove the boats?**

PL: We asked the Marine Department to remove them into the junkyard. But they are hardly even seaworthy. And that's one reason why it was virtually impossible to do what some people in Hong Kong wants us to do, which was to tow them out to sea. They won't survive that. As soon as you start towing, it will be sunk. So what do you do? You might as well not tow.

**I: So, on top of looking for space to house people, you had to look for space for the boats too.**

PL: But, not too bad. It's not too bad. Boats, you can sink them, they go to the bottom. People, you have to accommodate in habitable environments and not too cramped. And make sure they have food, medical care and so on. Children have some form of education while they wait.

**I: Food – how did you handle that?**

PL: Initially, they are all provided food from our emergency kitchen. Throughout the 1940's, 50's or even 60's, when Hong Kong was less developed than it was today, we have periodic typhoons coming. And victims when their houses in the hills are being torn down by heavy wind and rain. And natural disasters of all sorts. And one of the things we built up is we have a very, very large cooking facility called the Kowloon Kitchen run by the social welfare department. And all food was cooked there and provided in transportable packages with a barrel-full of rice, dishes, etc. All according to WHO dictative standard scale of nutrition. But of course, I mean, they are nutritious food but they are not always very tasty food. It's because you have to deal with such large numbers.

And also because the food was cooked according to Hong Kong people's style, which isn't necessarily the same style the Vietnamese were used to. Eventually, we found that for some of them when they are properly housed in refugee camps, they rather preferred if we give them the ingredients, the uncooked rice instead of cooked rice, and we give them all the other ingredients, seasonings, chilli, vegetables, meat – they'd rather cook it themselves. So eventually, we ended up having cooking facilities within the camps as well. That way, they can cook for themselves whatever they liked for the day. And they can season it in whatever way that they are used to.

**I: What about the cost of taking care of them? Food, accommodations, transportations, etc?**

PL: The cost is agreed internationally under UNHCR auspices. I can't remember, I think it was in late July '79. We have to bear – the Hong Kong Government – had to bear all the costs. Afterwards, I think it was credited, for those who were detained, pending confirmation documentation and examination – for confirmation that they are Vietnamese refugees – while they are under detention, we paid for their cost of detention, their food, medicine etc. Once they are confirmed refugees and sent to live in refugee camps, the cost is incurred by the agency running the camp and UNHCR was supposed to be responsible for the cost of care and maintenance of all refugees.

In return, the Hong Kong Government undertook to accept all refugee arrivals and give them first point of asylum and treat them in the way that I described. This was until UNHCR finds resettlement places for them elsewhere. Sometimes because of the scale of the influx and the scale of the number or people, it probably takes quite a long time. In the meantime, once they are finally housed in refugee camps, it is of course the camp authorities which arrange for cost of their care and maintenance. And the cost in theory is borne by the UNHCR. But over the years of course, the Vietnamese boat people crisis has lasted, some 30 years as far as Hong Kong is concerned.

At some point in time, of course, the UNHCR has simply run out of money. So, we then entered into an agreement whereby UNHCR accepts that while we say we will pay for the cost of their care and maintenance initially, but the UNHCR will reimburse us when they have the money available. But even up til now, they didn't have the money available and is still recorded in the Hong Kong Government as a debt owed by the UNHCR to Hong Kong.

**I: Any chance of them repaying?**

PL: You ask UNHCR about that. The UNHCR itself doesn't have a lot of money. The cost of its programs worldwide is mostly funded through donations by countries. And if countries don't donate, they don't have money. In the late 70's – early 80's, there was a lot of international sympathy for the plight of the Vietnamese boat people. From especially western countries, there was funding earmarked for the Vietnamese refugee program. Don't forget at the time there were a lot of refugee programs all over the world, particularly in America and later in Europe. But of course once this thing has dragged on for so long, people are fatigued, Vietnamese refugee fatigue, the money dried up. And money available in donor countries were earmarked for other refugees, for more urgent refugee situations where people are literally starving and unhoused and so on and so forth. You can understand why that happens. And there is no money. The UNHCR couldn't reimburse anything. Because of humanitarian reasons we kept on doing [our work]. I think it's certainly last I recall, almost \$1 billion HKD owed by UNHCR.

**I: How did the taxpayers in Hong Kong react to this?**

PL: Pretty badly, I guess. Every year we get the accounts written up by the Commissioner for Audit and the Audit Report gives us help. And every year the Audit Report says we must chase up the UNHCR to pay. And the UNHCR says, 'well we don't have the funds, we can't pay'. There are certain ethical standards that we do have to follow whatever the politics of that are. We can't simply say, 'ok if UNHCR doesn't pay up, we won't find food for you'. That's not what we would be doing. Once of course after the screening policy is in place and once they've screened the refugees and transferred to open camps, they are allowed to work and earn a living just like everybody else in Hong Kong. And they earn their own keep.

So the cost for refugees is essentially not that high. Because a lot of them were self-supporting and the cost of care and maintenance per refugee is much lower. But Hong Kong Government was then left with the bill for those who were screened out as non-refugees, which as you know, there were tens of thousands of them arriving in the late 80's and 90's mostly, from North Vietnam, who were screened out under international regulations and standards as non-refugees. And they were held pending repatriation to Vietnam.

That bill was borne entirely by the Government. Because in the late 80's and early 90's, they were mostly from North Vietnam and screened out as refugees. That cost was pretty high, and of course makes the people of Hong Kong even angrier. The fact that Hong Kong had to shoulder the bill. When this was a result of the war in Vietnam of which Hong Kong plays no part.

**I: How did those people who were screened-out react? What happened to them once they were screened-out?**

PL: They were kept in detention camps. We can't allow them to be put in open camps because otherwise they disappear and it is virtually impossible to find them. But the policy as agreed with the UNHCR and internationally, they are kept pending repatriation to Vietnam. Of course it took a long time to set up repatriation arrangements. I think the last time they were repatriated was well into the 1990's, probably even some time after I left. But we just have to live with the fact that we can't let them out into the streets of Hong Kong otherwise we will never be able to find them again. Of course, if I were them, I would understand that you wouldn't like to be locked up.

The problem is that if they are non-refugees, no one else would take them. The Americans would keep saying that we were being inhumane in locking them up. But we said, 'fine you can take them'. But nobody would take them. The Government of Vietnam took a very, very long time to repatriate a few of them. It was many years before their repatriation was completed. You can understand the frustration, but remember, these are not refugees. These are people from North Vietnam who have never been involved in the war itself, fighting for the North Vietnamese Government, who were never subjected to the kind of persecution that the initial arrivals from the South were subjected to. And now people like that are called economic migrants, and were screened out by a very, very well-grounded screening policy monitored by the UNHCR. And everyone who was screened out was allowed to appeal to tribunals, and then, even if the tribunals rejected their case, they were allowed to go to the courts, provided there was a court system. It was a very expensive business.

The cost of dealing with the boat people crisis doesn't stem directly from the direct cost of feeding, housing, giving medical care and education but also involves a huge amount of money spent on litigations. And a lot of these appeals are to the courts and funded through the legal aid system in Hong Kong. And this was taxpayer's money as well. I remember the time when I was Secretary for Security from 1995-1998. At any one time, there must have been hundreds of either appeals cases, or court cases, judicial review cases or the like. Hundreds. And every one of them was failing. But because they are under the laws of Hong Kong, if they meet certain income criteria – which they don't – they qualify for legal aid. And those appeals also costed the Hong Kong Government money.

**I: Apart from the financial burden to the Government, was there any direct affect to the Hong Kong people regarding the Vietnamese boat people?**

PL: I'm sure there was. When you have two different people existing side by side, there has to be some kind of interaction. I hope this was benign in most case, rather than [malignant], but of course, human society is not perfect. There was the occasional conflict of one sort of another, people misunderstanding each other, you talk a different language and it is very different of misunderstand each other. You come from a different society, etc. But by and large, there were very few cases, that I can remember of actual hostilities between the refugees and Hong Kong people. Of course in political terms, there was a great deal of adverse reaction of the people and especially the politicians against Vietnamese refugees' arrival. That reaction incidentally was not directed at the Vietnamese itself, it was directed at the Government. The target was the Government, not the refugees themselves.

So leaving the relationship between the refugees and the people of Hong Kong, and you talked about the people, there were remarkably few adverse incidents of any sort. And when you come to think of it, at least until the time when non-refugees began to arrive in large numbers and were kept in detention camps, the bulk of the refugees when they went through the initial crisis were housed in camps that were managed by voluntary agencies. Now these are voluntary agencies employing mostly Hong Kong residents, although there were a few volunteers from America, Australia and anywhere else in the world. But mostly by Hong Kong people. There were very few situations where things come to an unhappy ending.

A lot of violence we saw later on wasn't in refugee camps. It was mostly in detention camps, particularly where



screened out refugees were housed. And particularly, a lot of that was stemming from hostility between different groups of Vietnamese within the camps itself. One of the things you see is the degree of impact, which I think was a benign impact. Since then, there have been a lot more Vietnamese restaurants of certain Vietnamese cuisine in Hong Kong, so much so that restaurants serving Vietnamese cuisine in Hong Kong are part of the regular restaurant scene.

**I: So you were involved with finding accommodation for the refugees. Did you stay in your job there?**

PL: No. Once the great rush was over, I stayed on and my responsibility got wider. In the beginning of 1980, my responsibility covered the entire range of things dealing with Vietnamese arrivals. I was in the time a Principal Assistant for Security, and initially when I first arrived in the Security Branch in the middle of 1979, we then had two Principal Assistant Secretaries.

When the rush of new arrivals had come down a bit and we managed to find places for refugee camps, we reduced our numbers by one so there was one PS dealing with the entire range of things with the refugees in Hong Kong. There were a few – less than 10 people in the Security Branch – dealing with the refugee crisis. I had one boss, Deputy Secretary. And by the late 80's, even that position was gone. The refugee division was restructured, so I was heading the entire division and my boss was the Secretary for Security, who of course has many other responsibilities. But once you have dealt with the initial crisis and things begin to act like a machine, you have less need for involvement at the policy level. Because most of the people delivering the services are treated as a normal part of their arrangement because it is established. So you have less need for intervention, less need for officers at the policy level.

**I: How long were you in that position?**

PL: In the spring of 1981 before I was transferred out to do something else. I was in the administrative services of the Hong Kong Government, which is not a department specifically. We can do a range of jobs in a number of departments, so we get transferred post to post every two-four years. And we're never supposed to stay in the same department for too long.

**I: was that the end of your experience with the Vietnamese boat people?**

APL: That ends for a very long time, because from about the time I was transferred out of Security Branch in '81 to early '95, I had virtually nothing to do with the Vietnamese boat people crisis. In early 1995, I was posted at that time at a high-level back to the Security Branch as the Secretary for Security. Which has as its responsibility overseeing the entire range of emergency services and law and order departments which included the police, customs, immigration, fire, ambulance, liaison with the military etc. A whole range of security issues.

One of my responsibilities at the time was to be responsible for the entire range of issues remaining with the Vietnamese boat people crisis. But at that time, things had moved on quite a bit. I don't think I can remember the exact numbers, but there was something like 30-40 000 Vietnamese remaining in Hong Kong. But mostly, the bulk of them would be screened out as non-refugees pending repatriation. A small number were pending. A small number were screened in and waiting. There were still several thousand of them in manageable numbers. But the screened out Vietnamese were of course the most difficult ones.

**I: In what way?**

PL: First, they didn't get what they wanted. Most of them want to come to Hong Kong as a stepping stone to somewhere in the West – America is the usual preferred place of destination – and they know they didn't get it. The United States made it absolutely clear that they won't accept them. No other country would accept them. The UNHCR told them there is no future for them, other than to volunteer and return home. And a lot of them were still trying to hold on. There were still some other NGO's who were still finding them hope, one way or another. I won't comment on their motives or what they did, but with these people, we have to remember that going back to them, a large number mostly had very little education. They came from a very poor rural part of North Vietnam. But what they are facing back in Vietnam is probably less than what they get in detention camps in Hong Kong. They have less hope of resettlement in their country. So initially very few of them volunteered to return to Vietnam. But of course with a great deal of effort, we undertook an orderly repatriation program where they were sent back without them volunteering to do so.

Under the UNHCR and voluntary agencies, no violence or undue force was used. The arrangement was then that



they would be repatriated under safe conditions. We had a charter to fly them back to Hanoi at great expense, I must say, as soon as their acceptance was cleared by the Vietnamese Government, they were given some money and belongings to take back to Vietnam for resettlement. The UNHCR gave them a small repatriation grant as well.

**I: Were you in that position until the end of the crisis?**

PL: Almost until the end. When I left the Government in 1998, there were still some who were tending repatriation. If I remember correctly, there were also still some refugees waiting for resettlement. I think these are mostly the 'difficult' ones, or 'un-resettlable' refugee cases. They were unable to be resettled for a combination of health – both physical and mental, drug habits, disability, and lack of overseas relatives. There were still a few thousand of them. Eventually, I think we accepted the fact that they probably had to stay. Throughout the whole of the refugee crisis, beginning in the late 70's and early 80's, Hong Kong itself offered a resettlement quota to some of them. I can't remember the exact numbers, but it was never filled.

They didn't actually want to stay in Hong Kong. They wanted to go to Australia, America and Germany etc. The Hong Kong quota wasn't filled up. At the end of the day when there is no realistic prospect of their resettlement overseas, they just have to be accepted as part of Hong Kong's population. And I'm sure they are still there, living just as any ordinary Hong Kong citizen. They rent their own accommodation, they have their own job, and they are no longer in refugee camps. I think we closed the last refugee camp for them – 'Pillar Point' – in late 1999. I left the Government by then. But around more or less the same time, I think we closed virtually, we sent back screened out cases back to Vietnam. We closed off all the detention camps one after the other. The last one to close was in 1999.

**I: Apparently the situation carried on even after Hong Kong was returned to China. How did that affect the handling of the [situation]?**

PL: By that time, everybody had quite a clear idea as to what was going to happen. This was that the bulk of them would be returned to Vietnam. There was a small number who would not be resettlable elsewhere which we would have to accept. There was a big chunk of money UNHCR [owed] us and couldn't repay. Nobody had any realistic expectation that things would be any different. It was partly a question of time, when we had done everything. And partly a question of playing down the politics of it. Ok, politics and policy we just do all the work necessary, get the thing over and done with and the politics will disappear. And they have disappeared. Although, as I said, the UNHCR's debts are still on the books of the Hong Kong Government.

**I: It will be a great time to celebrate when they repay?**

PL: I may not live to see the day.

**I: Really? Given the experiences and the involvement of your experiences with the Vietnamese boat people, I wouldn't say one was less difficult than the other?**

PL: It was difficult for different reasons. The first phase – late 70's to early 81 – it was difficult because we were faced with an influx. And we were caught unprepared, and that was the difficulty. In [a] very short time, we had to accommodate a large number of people. But the people were mostly cooperative. Mostly very grateful for our treatment. At the tail end of it, the arrangements for handling several tens of thousands of Vietnamese boat people who are not refugees in detention camps – it's all in place. But it's unpleasant because the people who are in detention camps, they didn't like us. They were from a different 'breed' from the ordinary refugees we got in the 70s and 80s. And some of them were pretty violent, which partly explains the violent confrontations in the camps in the late 1990's. There was a reaction to the fact that, when finally, about the time when I returned, they realised that's the end of the game as far as trying to hold out in Hong Kong. They were faced with the prospect that they would be returned to Vietnam, whether they liked it or not.

Their initial reaction was to resort to violence. At the end of the day, especially, I have to take my hat off to our correctional services colleagues who handled it extremely well. It was, in many instances, a personal danger to our CSD colleagues themselves. But we managed to contain them. We managed to continue our normal management regime for each detention camp without imposing much hard measures. We just take it in our stride. Those inmates who had actually committed crimes in most cases, there would be harming people. Sometimes themselves. Of course, if they committed the crime, they are in Hong Kong which is a place where the rule of law dictates that they have to be prosecuted and they have to serve sentences which the courts decides under the common law. But other than that, we don't necessarily impose any harsh measures on them, even when they were rioting.

**I: For those who would receive the sentences for their crimes, would they eventually return to Vietnam?**

PL: Theoretically, there is no particular reason why they can't be returned to Vietnam after they have served their sentences. We don't remit their sentences and send them back, just because they are ready to be repatriated. That is part of the laws of Hong Kong. But, not every one of them was returned, because if you have murdered someone, you are going to have to serve a very long sentence in Hong Kong. I'm not even sure that when he gets out of prison, Vietnam will take him back at all. But I can't say that there are a large number of them.

Mostly, if you are talking about large numbers, most people do not set out to cause serious injury or harm to people, except when they are in a confrontational situation and things get a little bit out of hand. But it's not premeditated murder. So as far as my recollection goes, they are not usually given very long sentences when it's causing bodily harm.

**I: Do you think the numbers that were put in prison then because of those crimes would be in the thousands?**

PL: I don't think there are all that many of them. If you have a riot in the detention camp with something like ten thousand people, it isn't that easy to identify 'this' person is the one who committed 'this' crime, given the circumstances to a sufficient degree that would prove in a court of Hong Kong under common law jurisdiction that there is no conceivable doubt that this person is guilty of a crime.

**I: Were there any consequences for those who caused riots in the detention centres?**

PL: Other than any criminal investigation of corruption, none.

**I: So maybe that's why they kept on rioting?**

PL: But, this is the system in Hong Kong. We don't punish people because we don't like them. If they commit a crime, they are investigated and we prosecute them. But that's about all. There's no question of resorting to tactics which may happen in other places like restricting their food, medicine etc. That's not done in Hong Kong.

**I: Last question, how did the Government deal with the pressure from taxpayers?**

PL: [Sighs] Well, I don't really know what the answer was. Yes, it was difficult. We got pounded in the legislation from time to time, especially when I was Head of Security. Because I was the one who appeared in the Legislative Council and being questioned. We just had to do the best we can. I think to be fair to the Legislative Council Members themselves, they are just like most representative institutions and they do make a song and dance, especially because the constituents are unhappy with the way certain things are happening. They also realise that at the end of the day, there is not a lot that we can do about it. They know you can't send them back if Vietnam doesn't accept them. So it takes time, and money to send them back.

You can't just dump them, or push them into a boat and send them out to sea. You have to fly them in a Boeing aircraft back to Hanoi. After all, Hong Kong is a civilised and respectable place. We do have certain ethics and certain standards that we subscribe to. So everyone was slinging mud at us verbally. But we all understood that at the end, we just carried on doing it. But then of course, in political terms from time to time, you will have to give them an opportunity to let off steam. Very occasionally, we were asked by International Human Rights Organisations and Groups and interested NGO's why we couldn't let them out and give them a job? That is a humane way. All the benefits of living in a civilised society. We can't do that because of the pressure of the legislation, but within the legislation, we could still treat them humanely.

We knew of course that in a detention camp situation, they do not enjoy the freedom that most ordinary citizens would expect. But they are not citizens of Hong Kong, and they can enjoy the freedoms of a citizenship in Vietnam if they are prepared to go back at any time. And they will be sent back, when the Vietnamese Government is prepared to accept them. But until that is done, there is no way we can let them out. The community won't accept it. And you could end up with a very nasty riot in Hong Kong if you do that.

**I: What did the whole experience, in retrospect, mean to you?**

PL: We did a good thing. It was difficult and sometimes bloody annoying especially when they turned nasty. But

it was a good thing because over the years you ask yourself, especially with the initial batch that came through the Hong Kong system – close to 100 000 – the bulk of them were regarded as refugees. Where are they now? All over the world. Most of them, you never heard they had great difficulties. You assume, I hope, that they have all established new lives, they have integrated into society and they may be teachers, doctors, nurses, businessmen, technicians etc., doing useful jobs for humanity. They have their own family, their children and grandchildren. Yet, they came through Hong Kong and what we did was let them have the opportunity to make a new life elsewhere. Because the alternative for most of them would have been death by drowning in the South China Sea.

So yes, we did a good thing. I'm pretty sure of this. And interesting anecdote, if you like, because we were so busy at the time, virtually the moment that I was called to report back to the Security Branch in the middle of July – we were all very busy doing what we needed to do. So, the head of the Government at the time didn't get around to seeing me until about a month afterwards. And they usually try to see their Senior staff at least once. And he said, 'look, what we're asking you to do with the Vietnamese refugees is not the best outcome [perceived] by most people in Hong Kong. Do you have a conscience problem, because if you do, you better find something else'? I said I didn't have a conscience problem. I am a Catholic and whatever the rights and wrings of the politics of it, I don't see a conscionable problem of saving people from the risk of death by drowning. So, there you go.

**I: Thank you very much. As a former refugee myself, I thank you for your heart and humanity and what you have done for us.**



## Stephen Yau & Adrielle Panares

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Interviewee: Mr Stephen Yau (SY)  
Interviewee: Adrielle Panares (AP)  
Interviewer: (I)  
6:15, Thursday January 10, 2013, Office of International Social Services, Hong Kong

**I: Mr Yau, could you please state your full name?**

SY: Stephen Yau.

**I: Where were you born?**

SY: Mainland China.

**I: Could you please tell me when and how you got involved with the Vietnamese boat people situation?**

SY: I am a social worker so the two organisations I worked with, both were involved with working with Vietnamese refugees. So that's how I got involved in the Vietnamese boat people.

**I: What year did you start to assist the Vietnamese boat people?**

SY: 1975.

**I: That was way early on.**

SY: Yes, 1975 when I was with the organisation called the 'Living Well Service'. Later, they had a new name, the 'Hong Kong Christian Service'.

**I: Were you involved with the group that came from Vietnam?**

SY: Not directly. A lot of my colleagues worked directly with the Vietnamese boat people. I was involved with the planning and duties.

**I: What were some of your duties?**

SY: I was a social worker and part of my duties was to assist with the planning and administration of the programmes for the Vietnamese boat people?

**I: So you liaised with the Government and other NGO's?**

SY: Yes, at the time.

**I: How long did you work with the Vietnamese refugees?**

SY: Actually, from 1975 until the closure of the Pillar Point [refugee camp].

**I: Was it about May 2000?**

SY: 1998 I think so. And after that, we don't have any programmes for them but from time to time, we maintained contact with some of the boat people. They came to our offices to see us and also when I visited Vietnam and had the opportunity to see some of them.

**I: What were some of the challenges that you faced at that time?**

SY: The most difficult one was to get the public understanding of the needs of the Vietnamese boat people. And to get their support and also to get the funding support for our services.

**I: How did you go with that?**

SY: Well, one thing I remember back in the early 1990's, I was attending a live programme on the Vietnamese Boat people by Radio Hong Kong. When the Vietnamese issue arose, much resentment and hostility [arose] amongst the general public in Hong Kong. At that time, the programme was broadcast half an hour with Radio Hong Kong, and half an hour with TVB, and half an hour with the ATV in Hong Kong. It was a live programme. And apart from myself, the programme, if I remember correctly, was attended by Mrs Rita Chan. She was then the Convener of the Security Bureau. And the Convener of the Security Panel of the Legislative Council at that time and also a District Councillor, Mr Stephen Ng. And at that time, I was with the International Social Services (ISS) of Hong Kong.

As the Chief Executive, my role in the programme was to explain to the public our belief and visions in providing education and other support services for the boat people. Our position was very simple. The Chairman of ISS said, 'never mind the politics. It can never be wrong to teach children to read and write'. And after the programme, then I was surrounded by an angry crowd on the ISS position. Later, I think the next day, I received a death threat. I ignored the threat and even turned down the offer of the police protection [offered to me]. I believe the threat; I think it was not real. But just an outburst of angry feelings from someone who had not seen fully the plight of the boat people. But I didn't know why I acted so cool at that time. But I most probably would act otherwise now in such life and death situation. But it proved that we were correct in our belief and in our service.

Even now, I take pride to say that ISS Hong Kong service in the camp did not only significantly improve the lives of the boat people, but also helped to diffuse a lot of attention and enabled the public to better understand the situation of the plight of the boat people. That is one incident that I believe is very challenging. As I said earlier, the general public do not understand the plight of the boat people. When you set something which is not felt as the right position, they [the general public] will be very angry at the time.

**I: How did you tackle that?**

SY: To just keep on speaking to the public, to let them know more about the situation of the people.

**I: What sorts of support did you receive back then to assist the boat people? Firstly you said you needed some financial support from the public, from the donors around.**

SY: I guess mainly the funding was from overseas. And of course the UNHCR provided funding for our services. But other services – the education, opening of a school in one of the detention centres, in Whitehead. That programme was funded by a German industrialist. That is the funding from Germany and I also went to get funding from (various) sources to get the funding body's support for our services in the camps. They helped our programme for more than ten years. The Dutch refugees – a sister organisation. I went to different countries to tell them the story of the boat people and to get their funding support for our programme in Hong Kong.

**I: What were some of the services your organisation provided besides the school?**

SY: Adrielle can tell us more details of the programme.

**I: Apart from the death threats, were there any other incidents you can remember? Did you have any fun moments?**

SY: Whenever I am in the camps, when I see the kids, talk to them and sometimes pray with them, that is the fun part. And also, sometimes when I am in the camp or in the refugee schools, there are adults – the parents will

prepare the food. It's very delicious. That is the fun part. And also when you see the people get resettled, they are able to start a new life, this is also the fun part.

**I: So those are the moments that make your job worthwhile?**

SY: Yes.

**I: So after the Vietnamese situation finished, did you continue with your job? Looking back, the time with the Vietnamese boat people was more or less difficult than other parts of your career?**

SY: They are not the most difficult [part]. I have challenges even more difficult than working with the boat people. But the experience, the lessons I learned from dealing with the Vietnamese people helped me in dealing with other issues and other programmes of my organisation.

**I: Was it because of the magnitude, or adversities of the situation?**

SY: I think both.

**I: That seems to be a common theme amongst the people I have spoken with so far. The situation is certainly challenging, but in the end provides great learning tools. Is there anything else you would like to add?**

SY: Maybe later.

**I: Was there any particular request of service that you thought was unusual during your years with the Vietnamese boat people?**

SY: You mean the boat people's requests?

**I: Yes.**

SY: Unusual requests..(thinks)..? (Shaking head).

**I: Before we get to hear the experiences from Adrielle, what would you say the whole experience means to you?**

SY: I'll answer later.

**I: Thank you. We'll get back to you. Adrielle, just a formality. State your birthplace please?**

AP: I was born in the Philippines.

**I: How long have you been living in Hong Kong?**

AP: Since 1991. Mainly with the refugee population.

**I: Did you come here for that (purpose)?**

AP: Yes. I started work with refugees in 1984 in the Philippines refugee camps. And that prompted me to come to Hong Kong because I was very intrigued, by the fact that I was living in an almost open refugee camp. We were preparing refugees for resettlement, giving them 6 months training with the (then) International Catholic Migration Commission. So before they were resettled, give them language training, cultural orientation, secondary school orientation, that sort of thing that I am sure you are familiar with. I headed a cultural orientation programme, preparing people to go and find a job in the States, get housing etc. What intrigued me about Hong Kong was that it had barbed wire, and detention camps and detention centres. And many people coming from Hong Kong were

traumatised by that experience, but they had opportunities as well inside the camp. So I particularly looked at working for ISS.

**I: What brought you to work with refugees in the Philippines in the first place?**

AP: They posted an invitation in the University – a Math professor. I was travelling since I was 19, and was very involved with leadership training and youth and the YMCA. And was talking about refugees, migration all of that when I was growing up as a teenager. And then they finally posted an ad that said the only requirement was to train people to live in the States and having travelled to three or four countries and know what it is to survive. And you are basically colour-blind, because your clients would be from Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, etc. That was the ‘pull-factor’. The other thing was that everyone was a refugee, and I wallowed into the opportunity of actually getting to meet people who fought for freedom and life. And I thought that was a microcosm of another type of life. If you have all of them in one camp, and you are breathing that hope and desperation combined because of the trauma, I left university and went to the camp. That was what drove me.

**I: This sounds like your life story! (laughs)**

AP: I have a standing joke with everybody – it’s like getting stuck with a virus without any cure. But it’s a good virus. I think my experience with the refugees was an affirmation. If something is worth fighting for, people lose everything, materially, but they have strength in character and they succeed. I have seen people go from having everything to having nothing, but having so much more inside. That was a learning you can’t get anywhere. And they weren’t telling lies, they were telling it straight out from experience and they were living it out every day. And to me, that was the greatest lesson. And I wanted to find out if that environment still existed anywhere else in the world. So I shifted to Hong Kong.

**I: Did you have to apply or volunteer to come here?**

AP: I actually left the refugee camps after one of the mountains exploded – Mountain Akuba – and everything was ash in the country. Then I applied for the University of Macau, supposedly to go back to teaching and have a little bit of a break. But as I was there, there was this posting from the ISS, stating ‘Coordinator in Refugee Detention Centres and Camps with Vietnamese boat people’. That was more than enough to pull me to Hong Kong for an interview.

**I: How different were the situations of Vietnamese refugee camps in the Philippines versus Hong Kong?**

AP: I went into a state of shock (laugh) for the first few months because all the camps in Hong Kong were run by the police, or the correctional services. They were prison camps with prison conditions. You have a camp where it is divided into certain units. If you are in Section A, you literally cannot go to Section B. If you have your father in Section B, and you arrive later in Hong Kong, it takes a long time to be reunited with your family. It was very diverse in its services, so we actually were running primary and secondary schools, recreation, adult programs, social work services, information campaigns.

You can imagine us in cramped situation, literally using the walls to teach the kids. And the distance between the dormitory and toilet becomes a tennis court. And at night, (we) put out the tents, (brought) in a video and tried to show them the newest films in Vietnam. These are the kind of things we used to do in the camps, and we would have to do it under very strict conditions. It was very daunting at first, to literally walk into a camp and have all the barbed wire fences etc. And you can see the faces of the kids and the adults, looking at the barbed wire. Because all the NGO workers were coming at the same time on buses. So if it’s a holiday, nobody arrives right? On holidays, we sometimes compromise and just do something (for the refugees) because we are their only connection to the outside world. So our greatest job was to make it as normal in those camps.

The worst thing that Governments do is to set up these camps in the most beautiful spots, where the kids can only take a good peek at the beach. Beautiful islands, trees isolated from the city. But I need to get them a permit to get them (the kids) out of the camps to the shoreline. And literally put the kids on a tightrope to just do a ten minute walk back to the camp’s entrance. So that was a highlight. I guess the other thing that hit me was ISS was both the culprit and the ‘good guy’. For the time, we were really good because we provided all these services comprehensively. They saw us everywhere, from being around the kids, teens, adults and parents. And we would hire the teachers who were qualified from Vietnam to actually teach the classes. So we were paying the refugees themselves to teach.

We were printing Vietnamese books – we literally had our own publishing area. We would be holding books from



Vietnam, from Primary 1 to Secondary, then printing, photocopying them and using them. And we had our own report cards, because if they go back, we want them to see that they had been taught the same books. And they had report cards. And we went to Vietnam to negotiate an accredited report card so the kids wouldn't lose out. So if you were Grade 3 when you left and came back at Grade 6, they would accredit it because we had the same books. You could test the kids – this was one of the key things. We were also being blamed because we were the only centre where our space was where everybody could meet. So if there were ten sections in a camp, you would see all of them converge in the school.

So when protests or rallies happen, big activities across the ten sections, I would get called. Because they can only think of ISS as the planning venue. Because it is the only place where everybody can meet. They can't meet in any other places. And the guys we worked with were the most intelligent, the most educated. So naturally when they want to combat the policies and put up strikes and everything else on screening procedures etc. on certain anniversary days, i.e. the fall of Saigon, we were always on red alert. And we always get called. So we planned the whole mid-autumn festivals, Lunar New Years, those were the fun parts.

You wouldn't believe it – I would order 28 sacks of the red seeds – melon seeds to give away to one camp. We would put it into little plastic (wrappers) to make it look like Chinese New Year. It was pitiful in a sense, because we were trying to live the culture. But it was like maximum creativity and tolerance (put) to the test. Because people can actually kill each other over chilli. Because the kitchen was run as a prison kitchen. And then they get their own rations. And they get paid like camp rates, like prison rates. So we give them salaries of \$180. I remember I would have to take a taxi just to get the coins. And then give \$180 per month. And they will use that to buy snacks, clothing, or spices. Because it's so crowded, if you get to steal even one chilli, it could start a whole fight in one bunk. So these are the internal challenges that only a detention life would (bring).

Our therapy was a big deal for us. The kids were just drawing and drawing everything you can think about. From my old Vietnam, to my parents, to my grandparents I left behind, to the rejection I got from my screening, to my best friend... It was like every crisis every month for protest actions was relieving pain. And there was really no solution because you can't even take them out. It's such a (sad) thing. I guess the biggest contribution of ISS which we're very proud of was to develop people. So kids who came at 13 years old became our secretaries. And ended up learning (how to use) computers, English and doing work for us. And when they finally got repatriated, they were the only computer-literate guys. And so they ended up as managers of hotels!

One guy who kept on playing at the tennis court ended up a tennis coach back in Vietnam, and ended up with big money teaching how to play tennis. That's all he did! Certain skills, such as assistance in the office as interpreters worked out for them. In fact, my secretary who was a teenage boy, his only dream was to sit in the ISS Head Office. Because he knows everybody on the phone! He knows how to order stationary, who to call in the office and he's never been out. So from the camp, he was taken to Vietnam. The first time he came back, he looked for this address and literally called me from downstairs because he was already with his father-in-law attending a trade exhibit in Hong Kong as one of the primary exporters of Vietnamese products. And the only thing he did was come up this floor and say, 'who is this, who is that?' He was just imagining everything that was in his brain as a kid. He just cried profusely, saying 'so this is ISS'.

These are the things. And one time we went to Melbourne for a regional meeting with ISS Australia. And I was walking the streets and there are a lot of Vietnamese restaurants in Australia, and I love Vietnamese restaurants. And I was going into the restaurant and wanted to eat noodles. There was a very familiar guy who approached me, and I said 'I'd like to order this', and he heard my voice and said, 'ISS?' I looked at him, head to toe and said 'Name?' And he started hugging me, because he was our best student in the refugee camp. And I said, 'what are you doing here?' He said he stayed with a refugee card. And he said he was studying to be a doctor and get a scholarship. I asked who else was with him and he said three others were with him at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology. All three held refugee cards, but on scholarships. That night they had only one request – 'please, we've never been to any bar. Can you please treat us to our first bottle of beer?' And that's what we did for the first time. These kids were this high (indicates) when they started with the ISS. They were looking for the ISS because we were a part of their lives. It doesn't stop. We still hire people now who have worked with us from the camps. We still have teachers who are teaching Cantonese through our migrants programme. Still continuing to work with us.

### **I: Was there any moments that were dangerous for you?**

AP: Yes. Major accidents in history. Like the Shek Kong refugee camp where they burned a hut down. The fight was between the northerners and the southerners and the entire hut was burnt down. I was in the lower camp, and my boss said, 'go to Shek Kong and deal with it'. And nobody wants to be in that area because they felt that there were ghosts every night, and I remember we did at least sixteen rituals every night from all the religions, just to, you know ease the population yeah? And everybody was suspicious of each other as to who lit the fire. The whole investigation

process wasn't dangerous, physically for me, but dangerous because everyone I knew was traumatised. You can't hold a programme where teachers can teach kids who are just crying. That was difficult. The depression level was so high that you didn't know what to do. We became so creative that we just bought cookies and orange drinks and that became the lesson for the day, for a whole month at least. That was horrible, because you would step into the camp and see crying for months.

Whitehead detention centre was very dangerous. I think when they finally did a protest action and they burnt everything inside that made the news. And of course, that was the most stressful incident. So we, as social workers, the whole team had to come in immediately, because that was the first response we had to give. But we didn't even know if they wanted to see us. We didn't know if they would even listen to us. Those were the tough moments. Personal danger to me was in one camp, when a group of Buddhist monks decided it's time to take their lives. They really threatened management and simulated what they would do.

The head monk, who was a good friend, came to my office, which was a container with only one door. I was sitting there and he came in, doused with gasoline, and he said, 'I'm saying goodbye to you' with a lighter in his hand. He said 'I just want to say thank you because I don't think there is any hope in this. I wouldn't know any more what to do with our people'. And I said, 'who's going with you?' because he was very influential. And he said, 'twenty of us'. I said, 'where?' And he said, 'out there'. So first I was afraid he would light himself up in my container – I didn't know what he was going to do. I just embraced him and said, let me come with you and walk with you. As I was walking, I was signalling the guard, basically saying 'follow me'. And right at the back, in between the bunks there were twenty monks doused with gasoline ready to kill themselves. I was scared. That was one.

**I: What year was that?**

AP: Shek Kong was 1995. Fire in Whitehead was probably in 1996. One after the other. This whole school was talking about being burned down – we couldn't control them. That was when they announced the first repatriation program. Literally carrying people down planes. In High Island, because the manner of living was bunks. Very close to each other. People were so desperate to get refugee status and they were not getting it, it was very rare. Movement inside the camp, right after we got out of the bus, a father came crying carrying a nine year old child, bleeding all over in the genital area, and the father said, 'my child was raped, full penetration by a nineteen year old neighbour'. And the child was rushed to hospital, with totally wrecked internal organs, about 50-50 for a few months. All the father could say was, 'now can you give us refugee status?' Everyday people would come to the office and say, 'help me get refugee status. How much more do I have to lose?'

In Hong Kong, I think they had to prove their refugee status. In the Philippines, I knew they were all refugees, nothing more to prove. But here, they were going through a screening process, and the level of desperation was so bad. And ISS, because it was an International NGO, we had the uniqueness of being looked up as a strong advocate for them, because of the International name. So we got many letters asking for help. And sometimes we had to go to the Security Bureau. I don't think anyone would forget us because of all the advocacies we'd have to make, from 'please don't enforce that policy' to 'please don't use those tear gas canisters because the kids are on the front line', or 'please we've got massive suicides on our hands'. Negotiating at that level.

**I: I was reading in the newspapers of ISS services, that it provided advocacy mainly for the children correct?**

AP: It was difficult, because when men were in the line of protest, the children are first, then the women then the men were last. And I would scold them, and then they would look at me and suddenly the logic made sense. (They thought) If we put the children first, they would listen. If we put our bodies first, they would kill us first and then the children won't talk. It didn't make sense then. We were caught in the unique position because the security people, the camp management would ask our staff all over the camps – as we were in about 7-9 camps – ask the ISS staff to negotiate with the population because the brightest were the teachers, the principals. Our staff.

**I: How many of you in your team?**

AP: 3,500 at one point! Over 3,000, including the Vietnamese staff. And we were fun because we were a 'hodge podge' of every nationality you could think (of). People would come from different specialisations. We had Vietnamese, African, British, Japanese staff – name the nationality! The international flavour was there for all the things we did.

**I: What were some of your successes?**

AP: My definition of success is to see one life become better. I remember when they were closing the refugee camp, they told us. They had already closed the detention centres and this was the only remaining camp. And they didn't know what to do with the kids. And we had 210 kids that we were training to go overseas for resettlement. But technically, they couldn't be resettled because their parents had [committed] a lot of crimes. Like illegal activities. So our school was inside the camp. A UNHCR guy looked at me and said, 'Adrian, we have to meet with the Security Bureau and negotiate'. [I said] 'What to negotiate?' They had made the policy statement, right? And so we went there and he looked at me and said, 'how long will it take you to make them speak Chinese, if I give in to your requests to integrate these kids into the local schools?' And I said 'one year'. He looked at me quite cynically and said that if we couldn't even get them to speak English in many years, how can you make them speak Chinese in one year? And I said that with a promise from him to integrate these kids into local schools, I would do everything I could to get them to speak Chinese in one year. That kind of thing [happened].

When we got out, the UNHCR guy was unsure whether we could do this with one extra year of funding. I said we would do it – with the parents and the kids. And that's what we did. We had to tell our local teachers... we had to say goodbye and that we were no longer an English curriculum. We had to fire 90% of our staff. We needed to hire Chinese teachers because everything was in Chinese, (like) Math. The only thing in English was the English subject. Even Arts and PE were in Chinese. The books all belonged to the Education Department. But we promised we would do it in one year. The parents would come home and teach them how to speak Chinese. Then the kids would be in school and we would teach them how to speak Chinese. And on the weekends, we would do activities with everything in Chinese.

At the end of the year, we invited them and we did an entire programme, from MC to drama to the whole production in Chinese. They got the kids in. 210 of them. But the sacrifice the parents and kids made was high. The one I saw in Australia was meant to be a Grade 6 English Medium. He had to go down to a Grade 3 in Chinese. He was the tallest Grade 3 student, the oldest. But we had kept on the Education Coordinator (one of our Chinese teachers) and we made him go around to all the schools to reassure the kids. And we would organise (camps) for the kids. Primary level at 14 years old, just because of the language (skills)... he's now a medical doctor (the one from Australia). That's what keeps you going.

I think with ISS, it has invested in things that are not proven to be, 'workable'. But it made sense in the development of people. There was a lot of risk as to whether it would work or not. A lot of advocacy was required. We would have to sit in front of Government; we would literally beg donors because we couldn't even convince people at times. But when success comes, suddenly everybody is in the picture, saying 'yes, we were assisting' and we would be smiling at the back remembering the times we had been turned down. That's the thing that made ISS sustain itself, even beyond the refugee project for the Vietnamese. It was knowing all these things. All these stories.

Mrs Maud was one of the eldest of our Board – she is now 86. To this day, she writes to a Vietnamese (lady) who is now in the US. And this client was a grandmother who helped her grandchildren escape. To this day, she gets Christmas cards from the entire family. Mr Laurence is our 100 year old member of the Board. If you ask him what is the (most) fun thing he has done, it will be going to the camps and seeing the lovely Vietnamese ladies dressing up and treated to Vietnamese songs, dances and food on teacher's day, school graduations or festivals.

SY: We just celebrated 100 years, (the board member's) birthday last August.

AP: Without the cooperation of the Vietnamese Government when we went there... we actually wanted to have a school in Vietnam to sustain our operations, but the Government didn't even want to give us any property. They wanted us to buy everything! [laughs] We were an NGO, there was no partnership. We had to buy! That was difficult. But all these people I'm talking about actually went to Vietnam and visited these people [resettled refugees]. 'Unaccompanied minors' were the toughest group for us. Because they held on to the promise they gave their parents. So when the forced repatriation programme was implemented, we were literally hollering at kids on the light towers, because they'd rather die and jump off than break the promise from their parents.

Every day I would report to them, saying 'three are up on the pole'. We couldn't close the office. The only solution we came up with was that we had a delegation of three people; we took videos of the kids asking permission to their parents to go home. And letters. And I went to every house from Hai Phong down to Da Nang, down to Saigon, chasing at least forty addresses. It was crazy finding any house in Vietnam. I was taking shots of their parents with an interpreter, saying, 'please give them permission to go home'. And after taking shots of their mothers saying it's ok to go home, I would give them the shots of their children on the poles. I was asking them to make the choice.

We were doing counselling at the camps in Vietnam, and counselling here for the people. And that was the only reason the kids believed. But it was tough! We came back after nine days of that trip feeling emotionally drained, exhausted. That was during the forced repatriation at Whitehead when they created the voluntary repatriation inside.

I created the youth programme. I was making the unaccompanied minors youth leaders. And then I would suddenly see my youth leader going up the pole! It was a dead end for us. We were just lucky to convince the UN to give us money for the trip. To this day, I will never forget the look on their parents' faces when they knew their child was alive and ok. We did this because we didn't want the kids to hurt themselves.

**I: How difficult was that, for you to convince the parents? Were most of them cooperative?**

AP: They had the misconception that if they went to Hong Kong, they would go to the US immediately. It was hard to convince the parents that this was not going to happen. This whole screening process was difficult to explain. Because to them, the minute they left Vietnam, that's a future. So returning to Vietnam for them was like a dead end. Why get them back here? And their parents were angry, because they showed us how difficult the life was (in Vietnam). Some parents would tell us the reality that before he left, we had a house. Now look, we are in a bamboo shack. At least there, he could eat, sleep and eat three square meals a day. If he comes back, what will I do with him? I remember going to Hi Fong, going to the charcoal driven areas in the outskirts looking for this 'mum and dad'. And the difficult part was actually knowing that one of the parents had died. And it was reality.

It was hard to convince people of the truth. And they wouldn't believe me, just by my words. Both sides – parents and kids. So I had to take the videos. They won't believe Vietnam was becoming more open, so we had to take Vietnam movies. I remember my greatest fear of my life. We were smuggling the Vietnamese movies, knowing this was going to be a nightmare. And my partner was the wife of the Consul, saying her husband would kill her. Because we were literally smuggling the videos because they were all produced in Vietnam. At least they would know that we were not frauds, fabricating anything. This was the kind of thing we did, on the side.

**I: You are unbelievable.**

AP: In ISS, we jumped the cliffs.

SY: Now, what does it mean to me? [Stephen remembers] Everything is possible with persistence and determination. [Laughs] That's what I have learned all these years.

AP: We had to believe that what we were doing was right, under the most difficult circumstances. Even if everybody thought I was crazy.

SY: The idea of the portable school, (nobody believed it). They thought it was crazy. We managed to get the German donors. I remember we signed the contract at the Sheraton hotel. It was a start, you know. And he managed to donate \$1 million at that time to us to build the school. Then he would come every year and give the kids sweets and goodies like a Santa Claus. I still maintain contact with him. From time to time, he sends a message to us.

**I: Could you describe to me the portable school?**

AP: It was forty foot containers assigned as one classroom. So each container was air-conditioned, fully equipped. Looks like containers stuck one after the other, but once you get in, it's fully air-conditioned, good flooring, wooden panels and all the equipment.

**I: And were they on wheels?**

AP: No, they were stacked one on top of the other on metal ladders. It was like a great, geometric design of metal work. And then, we would say that it our school. Everybody would say, 'it doesn't look like a school'. And we would show them it had better facilities than the camp schools.

**I: How many levels were the containers?**

AP: All the Primary 1-3 were there in that school. 4 and 5, you had to go inside the camp. I think we had about thirty classrooms. Three floors of containers at least. One floor was about four containers with a teacher's room and a faculty room.

**I: How many camps had the portable schools?**

AP: Just one. It was too expensive. The rest of the camps wouldn't allow us. Whitehead was large enough to accommodate it. You know what was the fun part? We chose Primary 1-3 because the kids had a free playground

whenever they went to school. Because even the police would have fun playing with the kids in the container area with their own playgrounds. The CSD (Correctional Services Department). Each camp had its own uniqueness. Whitehead was the biggest and most difficult to run. It was the strictest. But Tai A Chau was like a resort island. Tai A Chau was an island that was a camp.

If you want weird requests? People would ask for three fishing boats. We would ask why? Do they want to go back to Vietnam? (laughs) At Board meetings, I had to ask on behalf of the three communities for fishing boats. I came up with an alternative solution for them to fish. We gave out fishing rods. There's a part of the island that they can start fishing, hunt for crabs, build temples. They would look for a good position to build their temples. It would range from the Buddhist to the church. I would learn about all the religions, just by looking at all the items going up around the island. We had a hut there that was not a container. It was one big playground area that was covered.

**I: Do you have a list of all the donors?**

SY: I think we do.

**I: Because I plan to acknowledge them in some way.**

AP: You would be surprised at some of them. Cameron Mackintosh. We benefited from Miss Saigon. The producer of Miss Saigon. He gave us money to start the schools. Skills training, etc. So we had the Mackintosh funds for adult education and skills training.

**I: I couldn't thank you enough.**

AP: There's something about the strength of refugees that drives you, as a worker, as a servant to actually give your best. Because it is just so humiliating not to do it. When you look at how much investment they have done for a better life, it is more than a job and a commitment. You can't do any less. It's actually a privilege to be able to work in the camps and see all these personalities. One of the biggest experiences was in the Philippines was a Level F Class – beyond interpreter level. First language was English. The Vietnamese class only had ten people. A pianist, a painter who was well-known in Vietnam, a graphic artist who was well-paid, a Cambodian-Vietnamese lady who was a philanthropist. They had all gone to the States and when they got back to Vietnam, they were caught in the war. And their only way out was to be rescued. There was no curriculum to fit them. I was the only teacher available to them. I would ask them what we would talk about today. And this glorious doctor of Mathematics would say to me, can we analyse the chess championship last night? We spent fifteen minutes on this, and everybody asked to do something else.

I don't think I will ever experience a class like this again. But in these six months, I learned more from them than from me. They held a concert. From poetry reading, to a presentation all about readiness for another life. The next project we would have with the ISS was looking at the other side of the refugee experience. The people of Hong Kong can only see the cost, the problem, the social burden. Part of our responsibilities includes letting them see the beautiful side. I think part of our success right now would be that at least 99% of our social workers and councillors are Chinese. And they are appreciating the work they are doing. Which wasn't the case in the past. We had to get foreigners (to volunteer and do the work). It was difficult to get the Chinese to do it. Now, 99% are Chinese staff, wanting to give these people assistance. Which we feel good about. When you look at growth in terms of ISS, (this is) not published. We are very low-key. You will not see us in any media, (getting) publicity etc. Because we are comfortable that way. Because we are better resourced that way.



## Talbot Bashall



Occupation: Retired  
 Born: 19 July 1926, England  
 Resides: Western Australia  
 Interview date: 21 January 2012 in Perth, Western Australia

Bashall was former Controller of the Refugee Control Centre, from 1979 to 1982.

One morning in April 1979, I was summoned to the office of the Hong Kong Government Secretary of Security and was told intelligence sources had indicated that very soon, there was going to be a tremendous increase in the number of refugees arriving in Hong Kong. The government concerned that the steady flow of Vietnamese refugees into Hong Kong at that time was soon to accelerate and become a torrent.

I was asked to be the controller of the refugee control centre that was going to be set up. It was explained that my job was to coordinate the efforts of the Hong Kong Government in managing this feared situation. This entailed working closely with the various consulates and United States, Netherlands, West Germany and so on; liaise closely with the UNHCR (United Nations High Commission for Refugees) and all the voluntary agencies concerned with this exodus from Vietnam. After having been given a rough summary of what was expected of me, I was told 'to get on with it'.

"It took two and a half minutes for me to decide to accept the position."

I was given a pager – this was the predecessor of the mobile telephone – this pager would give a beeping sound, which meant I had to get to the nearest telephone to hear messages, which I had to relay to all interested parties. The Hong Kong Government, the Immigration Department, the Marine Police and all the agencies concerned with handling the expected influx of these refugees.

In order to know exactly what I was confronted with, I made it my job to get out and about and not only see the arrival of the boats as they came in, but how they were handled by the Marine Police and Immigration, Port,



Health and all the other arms of the Hong Kong Government who were concerned with the arrival of these poor unfortunates. Becoming familiarised with what was actually happening on the ground (or should I say on the water), I was getting myself used to the situation. The experience was invaluable; it gave me an intricate understanding of what was happening.

I had no idea at all about what the job would be like. It was something that I had never experience before in my whole life. There was no rule of thumb in dealing with this situation because what were happening daily, hourly, were boats arriving from Vietnam on a regular basis. From three or four hundred a day to over a thousand a day in June 1979.

"The highest number of refugees we received in one day was indelibly imprinted in my memory: 4,516 on the 10 June 1979 in 42 boats. We were nearly overcome. I don't know if you can imagine over four thousand arriving."

Out in the western quarantine anchorage, there was a pontoon. And we had to use that as a mother-ship, so to speak. And these boats would arrive, and all try to jostle for space on the pontoon. But we had to arrange it so that they were kept in orderly fashion. You may say, in a queue. So that we could not only check them – medical checks, immigration checks, security checks, and everything of that nature but also to determine that there were no infiltrators or may I say 'Viet cong'.

The refugee control centre was set up in the then Victoria Barracks on Hong Kong Island. As the boats arrived I had to relay information up to the Secretary of Security and his staff, so everyone knew exactly what was happening, and how many were coming in, and how to cope with them. We had to keep them at the western quarantine anchorage for seven days for security checks as well as medical checks. And we then took them into what we called the Hong Kong Government dockyard.

This was a huge 'go-down', with access by sea and a landing stage there. It was actually earmarked for demolition and this huge 'go-down' had a leaking roof, but a very large amount of space. So in a way, it was a blessing in disguise because we had somewhere for the boats, after they had come in after seven days, we had somewhere to bring them in. We also had the voluntary agencies there that would provide these poor people with sets of clothes and give them showers etc. Because they had been at sea for some time – three or four weeks, and some of them were in a perfectly deplorable situation.

And at the age of 52 at the time, I had seen what had happened in Europe after the Second World War. But I had never experienced anything like this before. Some of the boats arrived with mothers with small children, their clothes in tatters, bloodstained and gory. With the mothers and children, totally traumatised. They had been raped and pillaged by pirates. And I think this was something that shook me beyond belief. It was too ghastly to contemplate. And they were coming in, boat upon boat; hundreds of them, in the same deplorable situation.

I had been through the bombing in England through the early parts of the war and I had seen some pretty gory sights. Crashed German aircraft and the entrails of the German crew, spread out all over the trees and bushes. So it wasn't something that was completely new to me. But it was quite different, seeing the Vietnamese coming in.

And one thing that is indelibly imprinted in my mind. This poor woman with three or four children, ragged clothing, and she walked towards me. And she had a dead baby, quite dead in her arms. I didn't really know how to handle this. We were overtaken by yet another boat, yet another set of totally traumatised refugees would arrive. So in a sense, we were overtaken by events. I'd never experienced anything like this in my whole life. It was too dreadful for words.

I think the world needs to remember what these poor people went through. In my view, they were quite different from today's asylum seekers. In the sense that the Vietnamese had no choice.

### **Q: What were some of the challenges that you faced that you can remember?**

I think the challenges were confronting these dreadful situations daily. For example, a ship called 'Skyluck' barged into Hong Kong waters in February 1979, with 2,661 on board. We had no room for such large numbers, as were on the Skyluck – 2661 [refugees]. So they had to remain on board for two reasons, a) because we didn't have sufficient accommodation to resettle them immediately and b) to act as a deterrent for any others who might try their hand at coming by huge, well-organising ocean-going freighters. Now, the human situation on the Skyluck was such that you had a tremendous lot of teenagers. We had the elderly, children, we had the whole lot. And we had to supply them with food, water and medical assistance every day. And this was no small task as you can imagine.

One particular family, the matriarch of this family was a 79 year old, very frail old lady named Giang Vinh. Giang Vinh actually died on the Skyluck, and such were the numbers coming in, that it took me and my staff over a week – in



fact about 10 days – to get this poor old lady's body to the morgue on the Kowloon side of Hong Kong. I was then approached by the family from Skyluck, who asked if they could go to the morgue and close their mother's eyes. This was obviously an old Vietnamese custom. Now at that time, the pressing emergencies were water, land, transport was so acute I didn't know really whether I could manage to do this for the family. But it seemed such a dreadful thing for this poor old lady's family not to be able to complete the mourning process to go and close their mother's eyes. I arranged for four or five of them to go to the morgue and do this very thing. And after they had done this, they seemed grateful and returned to the Skyluck.

The sequel to this story was on the 29 June 1979. The situation on the Skyluck, being such, and information told me that every kind of racket under the sun was being perpetrated on that vessel. Prostitution, gambling, everything you can imagine was taking place. So not only that, but we had to have contingency plans to immediately and quickly transfer these refugees from the Skyluck to someplace on land. Because it was the typhoon season and in the event of a typhoon striking Hong Kong, not even the boats at sea that were yet to arrive in Hong Kong would be totally destroyed and their occupants drowned. Anything could have happened to Skyluck because she was only anchored outside. They were in Hong Kong waters, but not very securely anchored. So in the event of the 29 June that year, 1979, some hot-heads cut the anchor chain and the Skyluck drifted. Absolute chaos reigned during that time. The Skyluck was drifting towards one of the islands off Hong Kong called Lama. In fact, she landed with a crunch on the rocks, two or so hours after the anchor chain had been cut. And it was then that the refugees started scrambling ashore.

At that time, the Skyluck was lodged on the rocks and she wasn't moving too much. The sea wasn't affecting her to that extent – I saw it myself. And we managed to arrange for these refugees to be transported by sea on various marine vessels to a place called Chi Ma Wan, which was at that time, an open prison. And they were transferred there in boatloads as fast as we could get them ashore. The extraordinary thing about this disembarkation from Skyluck, if you can call it that, was that I only remember one poor old lady who broke her arm when disembarking from the Skyluck. And we managed to get them all – each and every one, man, woman and child to the site in Chi Ma Wan by 4am the following morning. I think that was a truly remarkable feat on behalf of all concerned. One cannot praise too highly the dedication and cooperation and expertise, you may say, of all involved in getting these poor people off the Skyluck. Now you can imagine, after being on board for three and a half months, the situation on this vessel was simply appalling. I don't really know how much longer they could have remained on board without us having to take the bull between the horns and evacuate them. But in the event, the problem was solved for us in a sense, because we didn't have to make the decision [as] it was made for us.

**Q: How did you handle such a job for more than three years?**

"I think one just used common sense. And in each situation, each problem which presented itself had a solution somewhere, and one had to try and find out what the correct solution was for these particular circumstances."

But to give you an idea how things worked, and the chaotic-ness of it all, when ringing up a young lady in the Immigration Department one morning about one particular problem or a series of problems which had occurred in refugee camps, she said, 'wait, while I go into hysterics'. She was, I think illustrating that we were all candidates, in a sense, for stress, strain and even nervous breakdowns. Because this was nothing like I had seen before – nothing at all. And one was confronted with these situations, day in and day out. It was almost beyond human comprehension.

**Q: What were some of the incidents that stood out for you?**

I think it was the boats arriving with these poor people in such deplorable circumstances. They were totally traumatised. They arrived with eyes glazed, pleading to not only be allowed in, because there were circumstances in other places where refugees were a little less than being welcomed. In fact there were cases of boats being towed back out to sea. But as the Secretary of Security in Hong Kong said, I don't think it would be right for us to send overloaded ships – and he was referring to boats as well. To turn the boats away from Hong Kong on the basis of them taking their chances somewhere else. It wouldn't be right, and I believe it's to the eternal... goodness and heartfelt sympathy of the Hong Kong Government and its staff that prevented us from doing any such thing as I just mentioned.

**Q: Apart from Giang Vinh who died on the Skyluck, did you experience any other deaths of refugees when they arrived or otherwise?**

Oh yes. There were some boats that arrived with dead bodies on board. We just had to handle that. You see, we had men, women, children and the very elderly. I think, Carina, sitting opposite me, had first-hand experience of the conditions of which she arrived. In Indonesia and Malaysia they were packed like sardines. And that's no

exaggeration. And these poor people had nowhere to go and they didn't know what was going to happen to them. And I think, it was the elderly who suffered. In fact, Carina herself mentioned that the elderly were dying off, and she as a sixteen year old had to witness them being wrapped in blankets and thrown overboard. This must have been the most distressing thing a child could have witnessed. And this poor little love, aged sixteen had to look after a younger brother and sister. And she's sitting opposite me now, to become an intelligent, sophisticated young woman is beyond belief.

**Q: I have heard about cannibalism. Do you know anything about that?**

Yes I do indeed. In fact, I can remember one particular boat which arrived and it was noted in my diary somewhere. And this boat arrived with about 20-30 refugees on board. And one lad was tethered to the mast. After this boy had been interviewed, and we had to separate him from his fellow passengers, he told us that he was...they even had boiling water prepared, as they were going to cut his throat and cook him. And he told me that indeed, 2-3 days before that, one of his friends who was 14 or 15 had in fact been eaten by these starving refugees. This was a completely new experience. Cannibalism. But it does, I think, illustrate the sheer desperation of some of the refugees who had left Vietnam in these boats. Not only when they had run out of water and they were drinking urine. The situation has to be seen first-hand to be believed. But the absolute situation of disbelief actually cutting someone's throat and cooking them, in order to satisfy your pangs of hunger is very hard to believe. But this young lad's name was Dao Cu. He was only saved by the fact that he arrived in Hong Kong waters. I saw the boat arrive, because he was tethered to the mast. When initially we asked, why he was tethered to the mast, the refugees on board said he was hallucinating and we were afraid he would jump over the side and drown. So to save his life, we thought we would tether him to the mast, which of course flew in the face of what the boy told us.

**Q: What did this whole experience mean to you? How did it affect you?**

It affected me in many ways. I became an admirer of the stoicism and courage and the fortitude of these poor people who left Vietnam under the most dreadful situations of duress. And after undergoing unbelievable trials and tribulations under these boats which were packed like sardines, I'm an admirer of them. Not only that, but they have become absolutely marvellous citizens of Australia, and I think Australia's not only proud to have them, but they have been a great credit to Australian society because they have resettled with the Australian population. And I think this is to the eternal credit of the Vietnamese. I've met a lot of them first hand, and I'm an unashamed admirer of them because I think that they are really, truly remarkable people. The stoicism, courage and selflessness and so many of them I've spoken with and discussed what happened to them. There don't seem to be any lingering feelings of resentment. They seem to be relieved and pleased that they have arrived, for example in Australia and resettled here. And I think the same holds for not only Australia but other places they have been resettled, especially Orange County in the United States where I remember many of them were sent.

I'd like to say thank you to you Carina for creating a bridge between the refugees and the Australians at large who haven't the least idea of what these poor people went through. They really have no idea. And you have acted as a bridge and as I've told you many times, I'm a great admirer of yours for not only what you've been through, but what you're continuing to achieve. And I'd like to wish you all the good luck in the world, and I hope you continue to do this and don't falter or fall by the wayside while you're doing it. Keep your spirits right up and keep on doing it.

## Snapshot of Talbot's daily diary

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Wednesday 2nd May 1979 – A staggering 978 refugees poured with a grand Total of 23,801. It was a hectic day as they all are these days, with 'Skyluck' hovering always, as we know that the 2661 have got to be brought ashore sooner or later. At the moment there's simply no space for them.

Thursday 3rd May 1979 Over to the Dockyard (This was a huge 'Godown due for demolition, and consequently condemned', but having a 'quay' it lent itself admirably for disembarking the Refugees from their boats. This after 7 days afloat for Medical and security checks) and I got soaked in the rain as it fairly pelted down. Anyway got to the Dockyard and there in those awful 'Godowns' are packed over 6000 refugees. Many on boats at the quayside awaiting processing'

Friday 4th May 1979 – A hectic day and I was on the telephone for most of it. 'Skyluck' –every racket under the sun, prostitution, gambling, blackmarketeering, next murder?

Sunday 6th May 1979 – With another week looming and news of a US Destroyer picking up several hundred

Refugees in the South China Sea, it seems fairly obvious that they are coming, and keeping right on coming. Vietnam's policy is to expel all Ethnic Chinese.

Monday 7th May 1979 – An expected influx of V/R's, up to 80,000 this summer'

Friday 11th May 1979 – Telephone call POLMIL [Police/ Military liaison unit]' A staggering 1725 Vietnamese Refugees arrived. The 'storm' hit me as the magnitude of the influx became evident. Boats queuing up to get in choking up the approaches. Really a horrific situation. Over 25,000 refugees here now.

Monday 21st May 1979 – A long day with over 30,000 in Hong Kong, and 9000 odd in Dockyard. The conditions there are simply abominable, leaking roofs, insufficient 'loos', babies, women, the lot. HK is really being clobbered, these days, and daily they are coming in. At 4pm telephone call. 'Big news' coming. A British container ship 'Sibonga' had picked up 900 refugees in South China sea and was due midnight 23rd May.

Tuesday 22nd May 1979 – So much happens in a day it is difficult to relate it .For example, Tuesday a FCO [Foreign and Commonwealth Office] telegram re 'Sibonga' and a press release set the day buzzing. Transfers to Chimawan and other movements, and things to co ordinate and organise took all morning.

Wednesday 23rd May 1979 – Heavy and leaden. Thunderstorm warning too. POLMIL telephoned at 06.50 598 in 6 boats,-900 tomorrow –so they keep coming. One hell of a hassling day with everything happening the whole day. The main issue is of course 'Sibonga' when she arrives off Po Toi with 984 refugees aboard. By lunchtime another 600 or so Refugees had arrived by boat. The Dockyard is bursting at the seams, and this was, the cause of panic stations at 6pm. I have to organise a 'pontoon', kind of ' Mother ship' to provide for the boats at WQA (Western Quarantine Anchorage) where newly arrived boats stayed for 7 days for health and security checks before being taken to the 'overflowing' Dockyard.

Thursday 24th May 1979 – 06.00 this will be a humdinger of a day. It all stated at 07.30. A boarding party out to 'Sibonga'. A launch also taking a horde of the Press. Anyway I was at it with n'ary a let up. As the day wore on a reported 1800 more refugees arrived off Lantao in 10 boats. WQA, and then to Dockyard I went. Dockyard bursting at the seams. Then it filtered through that 'Sibonga' refugees will be accepted as ' UK Wards'

Friday 25th May 1979 – No open ended commitment on Refugees 'says Britain so 'Sibonga ' another' Skyluck? Later a pontoon towed out to WQA [This the 'Mother ship' I mentioned earlier]

Saturday 26th May 1979 – Panamanian 'hulk' beaches on Lantao [off Shui Hau] 800+ V/R's on this vessel 'Sen On' All easily sorted out . I was first of all instructed to 'Corral them' to stop them from wandering all over Lantao Island. This was done and they were then taken to Shek Pik, an open Prison, also on Lantao Island.

Monday 28th May 1979 – The torrent continues unabated 2550 waiting at and by the end of the day over 4000. 36000 is the overall total so far. By the end of the day I was exhausted.

Tuesday 29th May 1979 – Another fantastically busy day ahead 'Sibonga' was the big event [She sailed into WQA]

Wednesday 30th May 1979 – 4000 still at WQA in 50 odd junks, a hazard to shipping. The finding of additional accommodation is occupying everyone Tuen Mun Factory accommodation knocked on the head. Other accom has to be found.

Wednesday 31st May 1979 – One young lady in Immigration Dept said to me: 'Wait while I go into hysterics' [This must illustrate the pressure we are all enduring ] A Far Eastern Economic Review staffer when asked how many Refugees HK may expect replied' Anything up to a million 'A staggering thought. 'Sibonga' not allowed to disembark its Refugees, over a 1000– 1004. There's nowhere to put them. In the meantime 'Skyluck' remains off Lamma Island. Moving to just off Peng Chau ,Siu Kau Yi Chau, so that frees WQA.. of shipping Hazards I presume. As the day wore on so another 1800 Refugees streamed in...

Friday 1st June 1979 – A high-powered meeting this morning. Subject 'Sibonga' The upshot land them on Monday 4/6 300 to go to England in short order movements, and to day over 41,000 in Hong Kong now. As the day wore on more junks spotted between Macao and Hong Kong being towed by a Macao Tug, which later cast them off and guess where they are heading? [Note my remarks regard Macao Govt deleted!]

Saturday 2nd June 1979 – I took a couple of British Labour MP's round Dockyard (Jack Dormand and Peter Snapes) Conditions pretty bloody but at least the Refugees are sheltered and fed.

Sunday 3rd June 1979 – Another ghastly night I could not get off to sleep. Intensive care unit at this rate! Car picked me up at 06.40 and down I went tomorrow 500 to Tuen Muen (Accommodation leased in New Territories. The former 'rejection' was re thought!) 300 to Chimawan. 'Sibonga' disgorges 1000 and 300 go to England. In fact, ALL go tomorrow from this vessel. I suppose 2000 odd in Discovery Bay Anchorage [This another holding area pending accommodation being arranged] roughly 6000 all told in boats.

Monday 4th June 1979 – Car picked me up at 06.40 The first 'Sibonga' bunch to the new 15,000 capacity in Tuen Mun [the leased accom mentioned yesterday] "Sibonga" 1004 discharged and crammed in to the former Ma Tau Wei Girls Home capacity 80. In go 1003!

Tuesday 5th June 1979 – Situation at DBA pretty bad with 91 junks there. CAS [Civil Aid Services' told me it takes 10 hours to feed them all]. Only 118 Vietnamese Refugees in today.

Wednesday 6th June 1979 – It is reported that that two ships have recently left Hanoi with 10,000 refugees each aboard. No 1 Typhoon signal hoisted and soon 'the proverbial will hit the fan' I spent all day trying to get Marine Police and Immigration to tow boats in from DBA Marine police /Immigration not accepting responsibility. Nevertheless I got them moving, but pressure all the way. [Note with a typhoon pending boats had to be towed in to shelter, or risk a catastrophe of mammoth proportion, which could ensue]

Thursday 7th June 1979. Governor Maclehorse going to London/Talks on Refugees and Illegal Immigrants. I went over to the Dockyard in an Immigration launch, and took photographs of the Refugees as their boats crowded in one after another. HK's unwanted, pathetic. Uninvited 'guests' creep ashore. Really dreadful.

Saturday 9th June 1979 – Problems at the Dockyard; simply a case of heavy congestion of boats awaiting landing All we need is a typhoon and the panic will be on.

Sunday 10th June 1979 – 1822 arrivals yesterday according to POLMIL [Police Military liaison unit] so we approach the 50,000 mark with great rapidity. Answered my pager 'An 87 year old female refugee died in QE Hospital, also a 27 year old. 87years old, I ask you, and coming in a boat from Vietnam. Inhuman Hanoi Government.

Monday 11 June 1979 – A reported 2700 refugees in. A record if this is accurate. Discovery Bay [holding bay] bursting at the seams again. Feeding, water, all the problems await solution. It rained and rained heavily, all morning and into the afternoon. Regarding Refugees and Illegal Immigrants I feel the HK Govt is severely rattled. Many more are on the way including another 'Ha Long' type boat, due tomorrow? With the Governor going to UK, on the same flight will be some 'Sibonga' Refugees UK bound!.

Wednesday 13th June 1979 – 'Skyluck' Refugees on 'Hunger strike' All food withdrawn too. What a liberty. All uninvited and making demands! [It is to be noted that the 'unrest' on 'Skyluck' was a precursor to cutting the Anchor chain on 29th June when she drifted aground on Lamma Island]

Thursday 14th June 1979 – A hectic day followed with 'Skyluck' and it's 2664 getting restive. Two letters, petitions, appeared on my desk. One pleading and the other uglier. Refusing food and saying they will starve to death. With the hardening mood of the people and Government I suspect they will get short shrift. Tuen Mun water problems Immigration and slow processing and my telephone ringing the whole time. John Grieve [Marine Police i/c] telephoned me 'Skyluck' sitrep [Situation Report] 'Not ugly yet but they are making a stand, refusing to let crew collect supplies etc.'

Friday 15th June 1979 – News of 'Skyluck' hunger strike. This will be an interesting morning. First no rations, then at 1pm 'Send rations' and leave them on the pontoon [The pontoon was anchored alongside "Skyluck" to facilitate feeding and watering operations etc. etc ] Meanwhile the Immigration 'bottleneck' at Dockyard continued as I urged them on, to effect massive transfers all over the place. Leaving N Vietnam is supposed to be a ship with 5000 refugees aboard also a 'flotilla' from Macao also due this weekend.

Saturday 16th June 1979 – Malaysia says she will immediately tow out to sea it's 70,000 refugees and shoot those who try to return. They are building boats for refugees too. The news above was in all the Press.

Sunday 17th June 1979 – Horrible dark morning, but I slept well. Tel call from Tuen Mun—all problems solved so ready to receive Refugees a 1000 or so tomorrow Later telephone calls and mostly 'Skyluck' An ULTIMATUM from the refugees 3 demands. The main one that they be allowed ashore. This illustrates that a crisis is in the offing'

Monday 18TH JUNE 1979 – Immediately I got to RCC [Refugee Control Centre] I got a message 13 Refugees arrested on Cheung Chau'. What shall, we do? They asked. Midnight yesterday 6 Refugees from 'Skyluck' dived

overboard and swam to LAMMA, and were arrested and detained at Lamma Police Post. Later on 'Skyluck called off' hunger strike', which was never anyway!

Tuesday 19th June 1979 – A hot and sunny day and press on all morning with Discovery Bay boat congestion, likewise Dockyard Tuen Mun too and a host of other things To Dockyard with Imm officer and I got things moving but the mass of humanity there is gruesome, lot of them coming down Pearl River evidently Boats not seaworthy enough for voyage from Vietnam..

Wednesday 20th June 1979 – Still the refugees pouring in and accommodation becoming acute now. We fill up Tuen Mun factory tomorrow and then a couple of thousand or so go to Kai Tak North and there's nowhere else. 'Skyluck' simmered down and I later heard there was wait for it a scheme for her to sail away I cannot imagine where she would head for!

Thursday 21st June 1979 – Over 1300 refugees in yesterday and we now top the 51,000 mark. Observatory reports a depression forming South of Hainan Island the By the week end, weather expected to deteriorate. The i/c of Tuen Mun 'getting his knickers in a twist' over my telling him that Tuen Mun capacity was 16,000 not 12,000 Quite abusive but I guess it's all part of my job

Friday 22nd June 1979 – Foreign Secretary Lord Carrington coming to view the refugee situation' (Housing Dept) whom manage Tuen Mun say they cannot accommodate 15,000 or so. Too bad they have to!

Saturday 23rd June 1979 – Next week contingency plans for 'Skyluck' are to be finalised. More Refugees on the way from Macao

Sunday 24th June 1979 – 7 Boatloads of Refugees due to sail for Hong Kong from Macao as soon as the weather improves. I now brace for another week.

Monday 25th June 1979 – Bad weather off East coast of Vietnam. A Bill Ellis of 'National Geographic magazine' was brought to see me. Half hour interview This to be in the November issue evidently

Tuesday 26th June 1979 – By noon 9 boats were intercepted and by 6pm the tally was 621. With the Foreign Secretary's visit a great deal of flapping around. We had to try and reactivate DBA and keep the Refugees on their boats at the Dockyard, to let the Foreign Office visitors see the mess we are in.

Wednesday 27th June 1979 – 1500 more refugees arrived. I then photocopied [14] of the 'Skyluck' evacuation plan. Meeting followed on this plan. Then I went to Tsuen Wan, [Chai Wan Kok] to view a warehouse complex [This illustrates the urgency of finding accommodation for the feared increase of arrivals, which was by this time reaching more than alarming proportions] By the time I got back to the RCC there were 3 more boats approaching and answering my Pager' news of a riot at Kai Tak North This soon quietened down.

Thursday 28th June 1979 – The Kai Tak North 'riot' was due to it being a 'Detention Camp' [Note, hitherto the Refugees were allowed, with restrictions, to come and go fairly freely.] Raining, clammy, humid. By noon there were 4 boats and 391 refugees at DBA (This specially for the benefit of the Foreign Office visitors as there are now 'vacancies' at the Dockyard despite the conditions there being horrible)

Friday 29th June 1979 – At 09.30 it all started! 'Skyluck' cut her anchor chain and was drifting. The 'proverbial hit the fan' Secretary for Security in RCC and I saw first hand the 'decision making progress in action!' This was that 'Skyluck' passengers should go to Chimawan [My suggestion some weeks ago] Meanwhile 'Skyluck' went aground on NE 'Lamma island and Refugees were swarming ashore. Skyluck 'holed' and her back broken. The whole day was intensely 'pressurised'. Eventually refugees in three lots taken to Chimawan [This hardly explains the human problem involved in this operation as men women children, all had to be accounted for, and taken to Chimawan which is on Lantau Island I remember very clearly that the only casualty during the 'disembarkation' was one poor old woman whom broke her arm'. It really was a tremendous credit to all involved that it all went so smoothly. A day of high drama indeed. My day was 15 hours.

Saturday 30th June 1979 – Thank goodness 'Skyluck' is out of the way! What a relief! I was interviewed by one Emily Farquar of 'The Economist'. Feeding at WQA was the main item today. But with 'Skyluck' gone 'weak tea'!

Sunday July 1st 1979 – Towing of boats from DBA to Dockyard the main item today but with 'Skyluck' drama over who cares! Nice to be in the thick of things.

## Share Your Story

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If you were involved with the Vietnamese exodus, either personally or indirectly, we encourage you to submit your story to us so that it can be added to Oral History. The purpose of this project is to document the stories of those affected in order to preserve their memories for future generations' reference.

Please contact Carina Hoang by email: [carinahoang@gmail.com](mailto:carinahoang@gmail.com)

We look forward to receiving all submissions.

## Contact

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If you have any queries about the Vietnamese Boat People project or would like to get in contact with the project developer, Carina Hoang, please email her on [carinahoang@gmail.com](mailto:carinahoang@gmail.com)