

# **The Chinese/ Vietnamese Diaspora**

Revisiting the boat people

*Edited by*  
**Yuk Wah Chan**



Routledge Contemporary Asia Series

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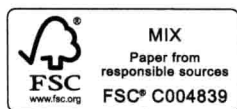
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# The Chinese/Vietnamese Diaspora

Over three decades have passed since the first wave of Indochinese refugees left their homelands. These refugees, mainly the Vietnamese, fled from war and strife in search of a better life elsewhere. By investigating the Vietnamese diaspora in Asia, this book sheds new light on the Asian refugee era (1975–91), refugee settlement and different patterns of host-guest interactions that will have implications for refugee studies elsewhere. The book provides:

- a clearer historical understanding of the group dynamics among refugees—the ethnic Chinese ‘Vietnamese refugees’ from both the North and South as well as the northern ‘Vietnamese refugees’.
- an examination of different aspects of migration including: planning for migration, choices of migration route, and reasons for migration.
- an analysis of the ethnic and refugee politics during the refugee era, and the subsequent settlement and resettlement.

This book will be of interest to students and scholars of globalization, migration, ethnicities, refugee histories and politics.

**Yuk Wah Chan** is Assistant Professor at the Department of Asian and International Studies at City University of Hong Kong.

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Permission has been granted to publish four images from the Paul Tran Files on Southeast Asian Refugees (MS-SEA002) and two images from the Project Ngoc Records on Southeast Asian Refugees (MS-SEA016) in Chapter 8. These images are reprinted:

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Permission has also been kindly granted by Paul Tran who donated the materials from the Hong Kong Detention Centres, where 80,000 Vietnamese asylum seekers were housed. When the material were given to Mr Tran at the time, the authors' intentions were to get their voices heard in the outside world, and the materials were not meant to be sold commercially.

# Contributors

**Ramses Amer**, PhD and Associate Professor in Peace and Conflict Research, is Senior Research Fellow, Department of Oriental Languages, Stockholm University, Sweden, Guest Research Professor, National Institute for South China Sea Studies, Haikou, China, and Research Associate, Swedish Institute of International Affairs, Stockholm. Major areas of his research include (1) security issues and conflict resolution in Southeast Asia and the wider Pacific Asia and (2) the role of the United Nations in the international system. His most recent book is *International Relations in Southeast Asia: Between Bilateralism and Multilateralism* (co-edited with N. Ganesan, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2010). Email: ramsesamer@gmail.com

**Ashley Carruthers** is Assistant Professor at the College of Arts and Social Sciences at Australian National University. He has published actively on various issues about overseas Vietnamese communities in Australia. His research interests focus on kinship links and cultural flows across the borders of Vietnam and the diaspora, grassroots cosmopolitanism, cultural borders, and local-global relationships. Email: Ashley.Carruthers@anu.edu.au

**Ocean W. K. Chan** graduated from Massachusetts College of Art in 1994 and received his M.Phil. degree in Anthropology at the Chinese University Hong Kong in 2003. He worked as head teacher and education coordinator at Pillar Point Refugee Camp for young Vietnamese from 1997 to 2000. He has lectured at many art institutions in Hong Kong, and has over ten years' volunteer experience in art therapy, theatre and music performance for community youth centres, hospitals and elderly homes. From early 2008, Chan has been directing arts and emotional therapy programs in quake-affected areas of Sichuan Province. Email: ocwk3@yahoo.com.hk

**Yuk Wah Chan** is Assistant Professor at the Department of Asian and International Studies at City University of Hong Kong. She has published on China-Vietnam relations, overseas Chinese and outbound Chinese tourism. Her current research interests cover migration and diaspora, Chinese tourism, and the Vietnamese minority in Hong Kong. Email: yukchan@cityu.edu.hk



**David W. Haines** has been a professor of anthropology at George Mason University since 1997. Prior to that, he worked for the federal government's refugee resettlement program and as a senior manager in state government. He is past president of the Society for Urban, National, and Transnational/Global Anthropology (SUNTA), convener of the Wind over Water comparative project on East Asian migration, and a founding member of George Mason's Diversity Research Group. His publications include several edited volumes on refugees and immigrants and, most recently, a social historical monograph on Vietnamese kinship (*The Limits of Kinship*, 2006), and a history of refugees in the United States (*Safe Haven?* 2010). Email: dhaines1@gmu.edu

**Peter Hansen** is lecturer in Asian Church History at the Catholic Theological College, Melbourne, Australia. By training both as an historian and a lawyer, he worked from 1990 until 1993 in the Asylum Seeker Detention Centres of Hong Kong as a volunteer legal advisor for Australian Lawyers for Refugees (ALR). ALR provided legal advice to Asylum Seekers to prepare them for their screening interviews with officers of the Hong Kong Immigration Department. During his work in the Detention Centres, he interviewed more than 1,000 asylum seekers, and was able to form friendships through which more of the inner workings of the asylum-seeker communities were disclosed to him. Email: PHansen@ourladys.org.au

**Boitran Huynh-Beattie** is curator and art historian at Asiarta Foundation, currently researching on 'Witness Collection', a private collection of Vietnamese art works featuring influential artists from 1921 to the present. She has worked with the Australian National University, Melbourne University and the University of Wollongong on different projects related to Vietnam's Diaspora. She also documents Vietnamese literature in Australia for the Australian Literature Resource, a collaboration between twelve Australian universities and the National Library of Australia for 2009–2011. Huynh-Beattie worked with Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre on several exhibitions, and was the Project Curator of Nam Bang! in 2007–2009. Email: boitran@asiarta.org

**Sophia Suk-mun Law** is Assistant Professor at the Department of Visual Studies of Lingnan University, Hong Kong. She gained many years of nursing experience before starting her academic career. Her research interests include the therapeutic nature of art as well as the early visual and cultural history of Hong Kong. In a two-year research project on the expressive and healing power of art, she examined 800 images drawn by Vietnamese boat people in Hong Kong detention camps in the late 1980s. In collaboration with Garden Streams, she organized an exhibition called C.A.R.E. (Vietnamese Community Art Re-Encountered) at the Lingnan Art Gallery in April 2008 where more than 200 artworks by the Vietnamese boat people were displayed. Her second research interest involves a series of interviews with elderly people concerning Hong Kong art and culture before the 1970s. Email: sophialaw@ln.edu.hk

**Jonathan H. X. Lee** is Assistant Professor of Asian American Studies at San Francisco State University. Lee teaches courses on Southeast Asian American studies and Asian American history. His research interests are in contemporary Chinese religions in “cultural China”, postcolonial studies, Asian American religious studies, Asian American folklore, and Chinese Southeast Asian American studies. Lee specializes in Chinese-Cambodian and Chinese-Vietnamese American studies. Email: jlee@sfsu.edu

**Li Tana** is Senior Fellow at Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies at the Australian National University. She has been interested in the maritime history of Vietnam, particularly the southern Vietnam. Her major publications include *The Nguyen Cochinchina* (SEAP, Cornell 1998), *The Water Frontier* (co-edited with Nola Cooke, Rowman and Littlefield/NUS Press, 2004), *Peasants on the Move* (ISEAS, Singapore 1996) and Inscriptions collected from the Chinese Congregation Halls in Ho Chi Minh City (in Vietnamese and Chinese, co-edited with Nguyen Cam Thuy, Social Sciences Institute, 1999). Email: tana.li@anu.edu.au

**Terence C. T. Shum** is a Ph.D. student at the Department of Asian and International Studies at City University of Hong Kong. His research focuses on refugees and asylum seekers in Hong Kong and Thailand. He is also a volunteer worker at Christian Action Chungking Mansions Service Center in Hong Kong and Bangkok Refugee Center. He is an associate member of Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network. Email: terenceshum@hotmail.com

**Daniel C. Tsang** is a bibliographer in Asian American studies, economics and political science at the libraries of the University of California, Irvine. Born and raised in Hong Kong, he did his graduate work at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. He co-founded the Alliance Working for Asian Rights and Empowerment in Orange County, California, a group that fights police abuse, especially against Southeast Asian Americans. A freelance writer, his essays and articles have appeared in the ethnic and alternative press as well as in mainstream publications such as the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, *Los Angeles Times*, and the *San Jose Mercury News*. As a contributing writer, he covered ‘Little Saigon, California’ for the *OC Weekly* from 1996–2003. He is host of a weekly public affairs program, *Subversivity*, on KUCI in Irvine. He was a Fulbright research scholar in 2004, based at the Institute of Sociology in Hanoi. Email: dtsang@uci.edu

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## **Part I**

# **Revisiting an era of refugees and boat people**





# 1 Revisiting the Vietnamese refugee era

## An Asian perspective from Hong Kong

*Yuk Wah Chan*

Over three decades have passed since the first Vietnamese refugees left their homelands. These refugees fled from war and strife in search of a better life elsewhere. The first wave left immediately after Saigon fell to the communists. The second wave occurred after the two Asian communist regimes, Vietnam and China fell out with each other, and the subsequent anti-Chinese atmosphere in Vietnam in the late 1970s. An estimated 70 per cent of these refugees were Chinese-Vietnamese. Unlike the first two exoduses which have been well documented, the third wave of mainly ethnic Vietnamese refugees who fled to Hong Kong and other parts of Asia between 1988 to 1991, has been somewhat neglected.

We were asked why it was worth re-examining the issue of Vietnamese refugees after all these years when the issue seems to have ended and the second generation of the Vietnamese refugees, especially those who had settled in the West, had already grown up, and no longer bear the 'refugee' status. Many reasons make us believe that there is a need to revisit the period, one which had alarmed most countries in the West as well as in Asia. It is the 'missing' Asian part of the refugee story. Although most refugees had been resettled in the West, many had remained 'stuck' or settled in their place of first asylum; their stories never told.

This volume is the result of a concern among academics who felt the need to revisit this era to allow the inclusion of new data and a more-balanced understanding of events in Vietnam and the many Vietnamese who fled their country. Many reports on the flight of the Indochinese were produced by scholars and journalists during and immediately after the massive exodus from 1975–80 (Cartmail 1983; Benoit 1981; Wain 1981; Grant 1979). These contain stories of policies implemented by communist Vietnam, refugees' recounting of their political and economic suffering under the communist regime, and their often horrifying journey in rickety boats. In the 1980s and early 1990s, accounts of boat people being locked up in camps began to predominate (Tsamenyi 1983; Oxfam HK 1989; Chan 1990, 1995; Yuen 1990; Sutter 1990; Le 1990; Chantavanich and Rabe 1990; Hitchcox 1990; Yeung *et al.* 1991; Freeman 1995; Chang *et al.* 2000; Freeman and Huu 2003). In the same period, a number of studies were devoted to examining the adaptation of the early refugees who had been resettled in the West (Haines 1989; Caplan, Whitmore and Choy 1989; Viviani 1996; Coughlan and McNamara 1997; Zhou 1998; Do 1999; Valtonen 1999; Thomas 1999; Bemak,