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The Vietnamese elderly refugees' experience in America

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**THE VIETNAMESE ELDERLY
REFUGEES' EXPERIENCE IN AMERICA**

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Social Sciences

San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirement for the Degree

Master of Arts

By

Thanh Dac Tran

May 2000

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ABSTRACT

THE ELDERLY VIETNAMESE REFUGEES EXPERIENCE IN AMERICA

by Thanh Tran

This thesis addresses the topic of the elderly Vietnamese refugees' experience in America. It examines the process of their adjustment to the host country, the problems and concerns affecting individual's progress toward positive assimilation, and the ways they deal with these problems.

The research reveals that many elderly refugees feel insecure, apprehensive, sad, lonely, and helpless. Those who lack the familial support, or those who are neglected by their children usually become despaired, unhappy, and depressed. Those who do not have English communication skills seem lost in a strange culture and lifestyle, spend most of the time at home, and become isolated from the society. Many of them relate feelings of uselessness in this country as if nothing depends on whether they exist. They desperately need help in better adjusting to the American society.

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THE VIETNAMESE ELDERLY REFUGEES

EXPERIENCE IN AMERICA

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Description of the Problem

Mr. Giau, a seventy-six-year old ex-ARVN Colonel, (ARVN stands for Army of the Republic of Vietnam) was detained in different reeducation camps in the North Vietnam for fifteen years, endured the starvation, hard labor, and slow death, and became a cripple. His wife died while he was confined in the reeducation camp. He recently comes to America alone, completely exhausted in his later life, shares a room in an apartment rented by a Vietnamese family, rarely leaves the house, and feels sad, unhappy, helpless, and becomes depressed and withdrawn. Mrs. Thuy, a seventy-four-years-old widow of a former high-ranking government official who died in a reeducation camp, arrived in the United States in 1993, and shared a room in an apartment in San Jose. As a former Deputy Minister of Public Health, she was detained in different

reeducation camps for 14 years and endured hard labor, starvation, and ill treatment. As a result, when she came to the United States, she has suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and reluctantly becomes a welfare recipient. She loses hope for the future, spends most of time at home, and becomes almost self-isolated from the society. She relates feelings of uselessness in this country, as if nothing depends on whether the Vietnamese elderly refugees exist. Similar cases are not uncommon among the elderly Vietnamese refugees. As I have been collaborating with the Vietnamese community in San Jose since 1991, I have had the opportunity to interact with those unfortunate elders who spend their later life in self-isolation and in despair.

Objectives

This study examines the elderly Vietnamese refugees' experience in America coming to the United States in the 1990s. Most of them were former high-ranking government officials and military officers, who endured perhaps the greatest hardship in their life in different reeducation camps in North Vietnam for a long period of time, suffered hard labor, starvation, and slow death. Additionally, their family members were sent into remote and desolated "new economic zones", where they bore a very hard life because of the lack of food,

housing, water, and sanitary facilities. When the long-held reeducation camp prisoners were released, they found their families discarded, their houses and property confiscated by the Communist authorities; they had no place to live and endured great and bitter losses.

In the meantime, many Vietnamese of special concern to the United States, such as individuals with a previously close association with the United States, who were detained in different reeducation camps, were not being allowed by the Vietnamese government to be interviewed by INS examiners. The United States has a long standing a commitment to receive these political prisoners. Therefore, in July 1989, the American and Vietnamese governments reached an Agreement, commonly called “Humanitarian Operation” (HO), allowing these political prisoners to seek asylum in the United States. When they arrived in the United States, most of them have been old, frail, and exhausted after being held in reeducation camps for a long period of time. Many of them do not speak English and seem lost in an alien culture, language, and life-style.

This research study focuses on the main causes making the elderly Vietnamese refugees unhappy, lonely, isolated, and helpless. Does the loss of social status have negative impact on these refugees? Does the lack of family

support make them despaired? Are the poor English communication skills the main causes of their isolation? What are the causes of their feeling of sadness and loneliness? What are their social activities? How do they adapt to the new society of the host country? What are the important problems they have met during the process of adjustment to the American society? The answers to these questions will help me discover the main causes of their unhappiness, loneliness, and helplessness, and to make some suggestions for helping them to better adjust to the host society, and to have a better life in America.

Differential Refugee Group Adaptation

Diversity still exists for Vietnamese whose society is strongly differentiated by class, religion, and regional background. Ethnic differences aside, different occupational groups, different age groups, men versus women, and adult versus children, partake distinctive patterns in adjustment. Most of ethnic groups that enter the United States tend to be integrated gradually, through the slow and often incomplete process of cultural and structural assimilation. As Mr. Le Van Khoa, Director of the Indochinese Resettlement Agency says that the Vietnamese refugees, can be characterized by one or another of three patterns of response to the necessity for coping with a new

environment:

(1) An “old-line pattern,” characterized by a deeply rooted loyalty to traditional beliefs and a “defensive conservative” reaction to factors in American life threatening their own values.

(2) An “assimilative pattern” characterized by an eagerness to integrate into American life and precipitous rejection of the old culture.

(3) And an “bicultural pattern” in which attempts to preserve traditional values and beliefs are accompanied by acquisition of new values and practices needed in a successful life in the American society.

Since all the people in this study are old and conservative, many of them adapt the old-line pattern and have strong willingness to preserve the Vietnamese culture and tradition.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Background and Significance

The Vietnam War ended in 1975; the experience, however, did not. For Americans as well as for Vietnamese, the experience reached beyond the soldiers, politicians, and protesters, into the deeper recesses of society. Its repercussions---the plight of refugees, the problem of veterans, and a plague of political disillusionment--- persisted in the United States and in Vietnam.

Scholars have classified the Vietnamese refugees arriving in America into four periods:

1. First, those who left South Vietnam right after the fall of the Saigon government on April 30, 1975;
2. Second, the boat people, who left Vietnam during 1976-1979;
3. Third, the escapees, who either organized their trips by boats to Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand or crossed the borders of Cambodia into Thailand;
4. Fourth, the Orderly Departure Program (ODP), established by the agreement between the Vietnamese government and the United

Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The Amerasian Home Coming Act of 1987 and the Humanitarian Operation program are under the ODP rubric.

1. First Wave of Refugees

The U.S. Defense Attaché Office (DAO) in Saigon set up a command center at Tan San Nhat airport to coordinate the processing and evacuation of Americans and Vietnamese and proceeded smoothly during the first two weeks of April 1975. But by mid-April, the airlift was canceled because the Vietcong rocketed Tan San Nhat airport. Panic and fear spread rapidly during the last two weeks of April, leading to many Vietnamese using small boats and other means to reach the U.S. fleet off the coast. At last, there were approximately 150,000 Vietnamese who left the country in the first wave.

After the Communists took control of Cambodia, Laos, and South Vietnam, the U.S. Congress passed The Indochinese Migration and Refugee Assistance Act of 1975, allowing the Indochinese refugees to resettle in America. About 130,000 of the first-wave refugees settled in America; and the majority of them were composed of mostly educated middle-class, high-ranking government officials and military officers, professionals and their families. They

were first convened in the Philippines, then to Guam or Wake Islands for a few months, and then transported to different refugee camps in California, Florida, Arkansas, and Pennsylvania. They were waiting for sponsors who took them out of the camp for their resettlement in any of the fifty states in America, based on the United States policy of refugee dispersion.

While staying in the refugee camps, the Vietnamese had the opportunity to choose one of the four processes to get out of the camps:

a. Repatriation to Vietnam: about 2,500 persons returned to Vietnam because they left their families there.

b. Resettlement in a third country: approximately, twenty thousand refugees, who had relatives living in a third country especially in Europe, joined them and resettled there.

c. Financial independence: if an individual had \$4,000.00, he/she could leave the refugee camp because he/she was considered as economically self-sufficient. Few refugees met this condition.

d. Sponsorship: the great majority of the Vietnamese refugees used this process because they did not have relatives living in the United States at that time. So they had to rely on the sponsorship provided by the voluntary social

service agencies (VOLAGS) or individuals.

2. Second-Wave Refugees

The second-wave refugees consisted of a more diverse group including professionals as well as people from rural areas and particularly ethnic Chinese, who left at the height of the Sino-Vietnamese conflict during the 1978-1979 period. The plight of the “boat people” has been well documented: atrocities committed against them included robberies, assaults, murder, multiple rapes, and abductions. It is estimated that from thirty to forty percent of the people who left Vietnam by boat never reached the Asian shores. As Caplan, Whitmore, and Choy asserted,

In 1978, hundreds of thousands of people from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos began a fight that has become ingrained in our minds as that of the “boat people.” Unlike those who were airlifted out of Vietnam after the fall of Saigon in April, 1975, this second wave of refugees carried much less with them by way of material resources, reflected greater ethnic diversity, was limited in education and occupational skills, and endured great hardship in their attempts to flee area. ¹

3. The Escapees

Because of the political oppression, religious persecution, and economic downfall, more than one million Vietnamese continued to escape the country from 1979 to 1989. Those escapees were people who either organized trips by boats to Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Japan, and Australia or walked across the Cambodian borders into Thailand. Many of them were held in closed camps for several years and inhumanly treated.

4. The Orderly Departure Program

In order to discourage the flow of clandestine departure, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) negotiated with the Vietnamese government to establish the Orderly Departure Program (ODP) in 1979 to provide a safe and legal means for people to leave Vietnam rather than to flee clandestinely by boat. Under the ODP, representatives from prospective resettlement countries, where their close relatives have been living and sponsor them, have screened the applicants before leaving Vietnam. Orderly departure composes of people who have been permitted to take an airline trip from Vietnam to a country of resettlement.

Even though there has been the ODP, the clandestine departures continued because authorized exits were severely limited by the Vietnamese

authorities. As Sutter wrote,

The Orderly Departure Program (ODP), which facilitates the safe and regular flow of Vietnamese to direct resettlement abroad, was in limbo from January, 1980 to August, 1987, and is still bureaucratically sluggish. No such programs actively facilitate the exiting of asylum-seekers from Laos and Cambodia. Reportedly, 1,000,000 Vietnamese are planning to leave their country, either by escaping or via the ODP. ²

By 1988, after being criticized by several Western countries and media, the Vietnamese authorities have cooperated with the UNHCR in accelerating the Orderly Departure Program; and for the first time since 1975, the number of people who left Vietnam via ODP surpassed the number of escapees.

** Amerasian Home Coming Act of 1987*

The Congress passed the Amerasian Home Coming Act of 1987 and made the following findings and declarations:

(a) American civilians and military personnel fathered thousands of children in the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

(b) It has been reported that many of these Amerasian children were ineligible for ration cards and often beg in the streets.

(c) The mothers of Amerasian children in Vietnam were not eligible for government jobs or employment in government enterprises.

(d) Amerasian children and their families have undisputed ties to the United States and are of particular humanitarian concern to the United States.

(e) The United States has a longstanding and very strong commitment to receive the Amerasian children in Vietnam, if they desire to come to the United States.

So far more than seventy thousand Amerasians and their close relatives have come to the United States.

**** The Humanitarian Operation in 1989***

On July 30, 1989, the American and Vietnamese governments signed an Agreement, called “Humanitarian Operation” (HO), in which Vietnam would allow individuals with a previously close association with the United States who were detained in Vietnamese re-education camps to leave Vietnam and to resettle in the United States. Since 1990, more than one hundred thousand of these political prisoners and their families have been granted asylum in this country.

Those political prisoners have been unfortunate and pitiable persons. In

fact, the long detention in reeducation camps has destroyed their physical and mental health. Therefore, when they arrive in America, they have very difficult time adjusting to life in the United States; since most of them are too old to work, loose hope in the future, and become despaired. Many of them do not speak English, seem lost in a strange culture, language, and life-style, and feel sad, lonely, isolated, and helpless. The Humanitarian-Operation refugees are perhaps the most unfortunate individuals among the Vietnamese refugees, but it seems that, so far, there have been no thorough studies on this category of refugees.

Although, many scholars have undertaken studies on the Vietnamese refugees and have praised their Buddhist-Confucian culture, their family bonds, that have motivated them to succeed in America, they have scarcely conducted thorough research on the Vietnamese elderly refugees. Freeman asserts, “Perhaps never before in American history had such a large block of people faced with such overwhelming obstacles succeeded so fast in turning around their lives to become economically self-sufficient contributors to the community in which they lives.”³ Caplan, Whitmore, and Choy in their book entitled *Boat People and Achievement in America*, mention that an examination of the

economic status of the Vietnamese refugees with respect to their labor-force status reveals the refugees' steady progress in climbing out of dependency and up to an increasingly higher standard of living. These refugees not only survived these hard times but also steadily improved their economic status. Their climb out of poverty is indeed a major accomplishment.⁴ And David Haines indicates, "Despite difficulty circumstances, these [Vietnamese] families climbed out of welfare dependency rapidly, given their situation , and made the most available job opportunities."⁵

Behind the success stories, however, there is also a multitude of untold miseries and suffering. Therefore, Asian-American elderly in general and Vietnamese-American elderly in particular have received little attention in social work literature and as consumers of social services. As Robert L. Shneider and Nancy P. Kropf mention,

First, unlike the other minorities of color, Asian Americans are not a protected minority under the definition of "socially and economically disadvantaged" persons. Public Law 95-507 specifically excludes Asian Americans from this category (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights 1979). Consequently, this fact leads to the exclusion of Asian Americans from

programs that are specifically targeted toward the poor minority elderly.⁶

In addition, the second factor is the prevalent reference to Asian Americans as the “model minority.” This label suggests Asian Americans have been able to overcome prejudice and oppression, the proof being that as a group their socioeconomic characteristics are similar to those of white Americans. This stereotype has become the basis for several unfounded assumptions, including that Asian Americans do not have problems, are able to care for their own, and do not need or desire social services. The socioeconomic situation and the history of elderly Asian Americans in this country do not support this myth. In fact, according to the US Census, March 1990, 12.5 percent of the Asian Americans have been below the poverty levels.

Conversely, a great number of scholars conducted several studies on the American older adults. Donna Couper states that most older adults manage to live vigorous and independent lives. However, many require varying degrees of assistance. Needs of older persons may include physical, social, emotional, and financial assistance. People living to advanced aged often rely on help from family members, friends, and neighbors.⁷ Daniel Krause argues that people are afraid of old age institutions, which have a bad image: they are isolated, and

moving there means the necessity of adapting to a whole new life-style.⁸ Robert Schneider and Nancy P. Kropf say that researchers do agree that there is a significant problem including physical abuse, neglect, verbal abuse, and psychological mistreatment of all socioeconomic levels of society and for all racial and ethnic groups.⁹ Jon Hendrickse and Carolyn J. Rosenthal suggest that generally United States policy makers have been reluctant to recognize the service needs of older persons as embedded within a familial matrix, preferring to treat them instead as individual problems conveniently disengaged from families.¹⁰

Western culture emphasizes independence as the ideal as exemplified in expressions like “rugged individualism” and “self-determination.” The reality is that none of us are absolutely independent. Each person—young and old, weak and strong—benefits and contributes to the whole. After all, democratic citizenship is about our obligations to one another; as more simply put in old Quaker refrain, “We all belong to one another.”

As the number of older persons in our society has increased, so have the problems that often accompany retirement. Contrary to the myth, only about five percent of American elderly live in the Old Age Institutions (OAI); but most of

them live by their own or with their child.¹¹ Reaching an agreement about institutionalization is difficult; no matter which way the decision ultimately goes, whether the individual will be moving in with other members of the family, staying by themselves, or going to an Old Age Institution.

There are millions of older persons, who represent a tremendous untapped reservoir of talent, available time, and accumulated experience, which could be of inestimable value to their communities. In their book entitled *The Neglected Old Americans*, Cull and Hardy mention,

SERVE (Serve and Enrich Retirement by Volunteer Experience), the largest single older volunteer program in the nation, has demonstrated that volunteer service is a way of tapping this tremendous manpower resource, to the benefit of both the retired and of the many community agencies and organizations in need of volunteer assistance. In initiating and developing the SERVE, a group approach was basic. Older persons were recruited in groups, to serve as a group, with individual assignments, on the same day each week at a given agency.¹²

In addition, the Senior Citizen Centers provide social, educational, entertainment programs for older people. Early in his or her contact with the

center, the new member would be interviewed by a staff person to determine how the center might be of service to him or her. The knowledge of the person's interests, family, health, education, and special problems can be elicited.

There are profound implications of the value for how United States public policy in general and aging-related familial policy in particular is formulated. First, the individual is seen as bearing the main responsibility for meeting his or her needs. Only when the individual fails in doing this will the government step in as a last resort to guarantee some minimal level of social assistance.

Aging programs are embedded in a federal system that can be described as decentralized, dominated by jurisdictional sprawl and fragmented power. The Older Americans Act of 1965 established a three-tiered arrangement in which authority and funding were distributed among federal, state, and local agencies. Because this system of services has relied on the nonprofit or voluntary sector for the most part to actually deliver services, the environment for program administration has been very complex. The diversity, fragmentation, and specialization of services in the aging network require executives to regularly deal with problems of coordination.¹³

CHAPTER III

THE VIETNAMESE CULTURE

The Vietnamese Culture and Tradition

It would be almost impossible to develop a thorough understanding of the adjustment process of Vietnamese refugees to the American society and the Vietnamese refugees' experience in America without the knowledge of their culture and tradition. The massive and controversial movement of Vietnamese refugees in America in the 1970s and 1980s raised formidable pragmatic, ethical, and political issues in this country.

Vietnamese History in Brief

Vietnam's early history is shrouded in legends: Mythical tales, passed from generation to generation, before the Vietnamese could write, tell of the kingdoms of Van Lang. Van Lang, the first, supposedly existed as far back as 3000 B.C. For almost 1,000 years, the tiny nation of Nam Viet held against the ever-expanding Chinese Empire. China ruled Vietnam for 1,000 years from 111 B.C. to 939 A.D., yet the Chinese failed to assimilate the people of this nation, who exhibited remarkable ethnic durability and tenacity, adhering to their own language and unique culture. During that long domination, the Vietnamese

launched numerous rebellions against Chinese rule.

The first Vietnamese rebellion occurred in 39 A.D. In order to frighten restless Vietnamese aristocrats into submission, the Chinese governor brutally executed one of their leaders, Thi Sach, who criticized the Chinese domination. Trung Trac, Thi Sach's wife, with her sister Trung Nhi, mustered an army of sympathetic vassals and their armies, defeated the Chinese forces, and founded a kingdom reaching south to Hue and north into southern China. The Trungs' kingdom, however, was destined to last three years. China sent its best armies to reconquer Vietnam. One of the Chinese generals, Ma Yuan (Ma Vien), defeated the Trungs' forces several times. After these setbacks, rather than accept the shame of surrender, the Trungs threw themselves into a river and drowned. A temple was erected in the honor of the Trungs, and their anniversary was dedicated as the Vietnamese Women Day.

Seizing the opportunity of China weakened by internal strife, the Vietnamese drove the Chinese armies out of their country in 938 A.D. Over the next 900 years Vietnam maintained its independence through the tactic of alternately paying tributes to China and repelling successfully a series of attempted invasions.

The crucial battle took place on the Bach Dang River, a tidal waterway. Ngo Quyen had a keen sense of strategy. Aware of his army's shortcomings in arms and men, he resorted to stratagem. His troops drove iron tipped pilings into the riverbed so that at high tide they would be hidden just below the water's surface. At high tide, Ngo engaged the Chinese in battle on the river and ordered his troops to feign retreat. The Chinese, lured on by the trick, pressed after Ngo's retreating boats. Then the tide began to ebb. At that moment, Ngo's men turned their boats around and drove the Chinese boats against the spikes. Their vessels were impaled, and the Chinese armies suffered heavy losses and withdrew from Vietnam.

The battle of Bach Dang in 938 has become as famous in Vietnamese history as the battle of Lexington and Concord in America's struggle for independence. It dealt a fatal blow to Chinese colonial power and prevented Vietnam from falling back into Chinese hands. The fame of the battle belongs to Ngo Quyen, who used the classic tactic of feint and strike, for which Vietnamese guerrilla fighters have become renowned. He put an end to Chinese domination, liberated Vietnam, and set the stage for the rise of a new and independent Vietnam state.¹⁴

Over the next nine hundred years, six different dynasties would struggle with the major problems of governing a country devoted almost entirely to agriculture. In 1284, the Mongols ruled China, and attacked Vietnam with an army of five hundred thousand men. Tran Hung Dao, Vietnam's best general, could mobilize only two hundred thousand troops, had to abandon some positions in the northern frontier, and used the tactics adapted to their inferior numbers. Discouraged emperor Tran Thanh Ton met general Tran Hung Dao and announced his intention of surrendering. Tran Hung Dao bravely replied: "If your majesty wishes to surrender, please first cut off my head." This helped to restore the emperor's confidence. Then Tran Hung Dao employed the identical strategy used by Ngo Quyen to defeat the Chinese army. Iron-pointed spikes were again hidden below the surface of the water at high tide and the invading navy drawn in. Then the tide ebbed, the Mongol boats were pierced and sunk. History repeated itself. With the victory, the Vietnamese became one of the few peoples to repel the Mongols hordes. Tran Hung Dao also became one of the most revered Vietnamese heroes.¹⁵

But in 1883, the fall of Vietnam to France was part of a larger struggle between the French and the British to seize chunks of Asia for economic

exploitation. The conquest by France was humiliating to a people who had repelled 15 invasions by China. As the Vietnamese became ever more determined to rid themselves of French rule, two rival nationalist movements emerged with fundamental differences in ideologies and methods. One followed the path of Western democracy, and the other adhered to Communist doctrine.¹⁶

During World War II, Ho Chi Minh, the Communist leader, seized the opportunity to form the Vietnam Independence League (Vietminh), started an insurrection against the French, and proclaimed the Independence of Vietnam on August 29, 1945. The War of Liberation against France lasted nine years and ended with the Geneva Agreements of 1954, which partitioned Vietnam in two political entities: the North under the communist rule, led by Chairman Ho Chi Minh, and the South under the democratic regime led by President Ngo Dinh Diem.

The Geneva Agreements, in reality, did not end the war in Vietnam because Communists continued to clandestinely send thousands of troops to cross the 17th parallel, assassinated popular politicians, government officials and military and village leadership, and launched an uprising in the South. As the Communist efforts drastically increased, the United States sent more than half

a million of troops from 1965 to 1970 to assist the South Vietnam. But due to the length and cost in lives and money of the war, the incessant protest demonstration in the United States, the lack of support from the U.S Congress and the American people, President Nixon began to withdraw American troops from Vietnam in 1973. The Vietnam War finally ended on April 30, 1975, with the fall of Saigon to North Vietnamese troops, leading to the biggest and the most sorrowful exodus in the Vietnam history.

Vietnamese Culture and Tradition

Since the dawn of civilization, the individual and social life of the Vietnamese people, in particular, has been simple, harmonious, guided by the natural law of the heart. On the top of their scale of values, far above material riches, are peace, friendship, and modesty, all of which represent spontaneous reflections of their unique culture.

An old proverb says, “The Vietnamese live on rice and legends.” Legend has it that the race was born of the union of a Dragon King and a Fairy Queen...thus the Vietnamese are sometimes called “Children of Dragon and Grandchildren of Fairy.” Almost from its birth, this race of people was threatened with extinction by absorption into other civilizations, particularly the

Chinese. The Vietnamese resisted from the very beginning the great assimilative power of Chinese civilization, and a distinct Vietnamese culture was born and has survived.

Life in Vietnam is based on a “rice culture,” attuned to the rhythms of the seasons of planting and harvesting. For thousands years, the technology of water buffalo was stable. One’s ancestors, the source of one’s life, had planted and reaped on this land. Their graves stood in the rice fields and their spirits continued to watch over the family. Individual death did not mark an end. Here the past and present merged and there existed the sense of a natural harmony between man and the land, between the living and their ancestors.¹⁷

Family Life

A traditional Vietnamese family has a cohesive, extended family structure and stresses duty, obligation, importance of family name, and ancestor cult. Usually two, three, or even four generations live under the same roof and follow the leadership of a patriarch---the senior male in the direct line of descent from the focal ancestor. The cult of ancestors is an important element in the ideological makeup of the traditional Vietnamese family system, based upon the belief that individual death does not mark the end. The Vietnamese believe that

the souls of their ancestors are protectors of the family line: it is to them that prayers are addressed, imploring for all the incidents of the family.

Therefore, in a Vietnamese house, usually the ancestor's altar occupies the honor place, where the entire family members gather on the occasion of the main feasts of the year: the Anniversary of the Death-day of the parents and New Year. The ancestral cult symbolizes not only one's spirit of filial piety but also his/her reverence and respect for the deceased parents. Thus filial piety and the cult of ancestors are the two aspects of a single obligation.

Indeed, filial piety is considered as a sacred duty of a child and as the root of humankind. In the family, a child learns to respect and love others, first parents, brothers and sisters, and relatives, then, by gradual extension, other people. Filial piety does not consist merely in giving one's parents physical care, but also in bringing them emotional and spiritual richness. And equally important, after parents are dead, their unfulfilled aims and purposes should be the aims and purposes of the children. This is more important than offering sacrifices the departed spirits of deceased parents.¹⁸

Filial devotion, brotherly love, and conjugal fidelity are highly valued. Perhaps these values are stressed because of the present difficulty, especially in

the younger generation, of maintaining them in a situation of social chaos and consequent instability of all relations. In contrast to China, however, Vietnamese women enjoyed a measure of influence and freedom. The Le code of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries sanctioned equal property rights for men and women and protected women against certain forms of coercion by men.

Traditional Vietnamese culture under the influence of Taoism values harmony between humans and nature; this is a “human-in-nature” orientation. This philosophical orientation is the opposite of the master-over-nature orientation in Western culture.¹⁹

The Vietnamese have a heart orientation culture. This means two things. First, they seem to have a distinctive preference for literature, poetry or music, which are deeply sentimental. They enjoy listening to slow and sad songs; they like reading heart-breaking , unrequited love stories. The Tale of Kim-Van-Kieu, a Vietnamese literature masterpiece, along with love stories in poetry, and Vong Co, the Vietnamese classical musical form, are the best examples because they portray the very sentimental soul of the Vietnamese.²⁰

The other aspect of the heart-orientation in the cultural root of the Vietnamese stresses the importance of feelings, emotions, and sentiments over

reason or rationality found in the mind orientation of Western culture. This is perhaps one of the most important traits of the Vietnamese mind. It helps explain the great complexity of Vietnamese friendships, and the resiliency of the Vietnamese extended family.²¹

The traditional Vietnamese kinship system is structured around the patrilineal common descent group (ho or toc) and composes of several nuclear families who are descendants of a common male ancestor. Relatives are essential to this family system. The widespread combining of families can be seen by the relative small number of the Vietnamese last names; (it is estimated a core about 30 to 50 that provide the bulk of Vietnamese names). The kinship system gives the individual a sense of security through mutual aid and also functions as a source of loans and business capital.

Village Life

In Vietnam, the village was an extension of the family system, a cradle of Vietnamese society. Enclosed behind a tall bamboo hedge, each village was a separate entity, provided mutual assistance, and constituted a safety net for all its members: the rich assist the poor; the strong help the weak. People are taught to be tolerant, to live in harmony with others and with nature, and to avoid open

confrontation. These facts shape the spirit of tolerance, cooperative, courage, and hard work and deeply imprint on the Vietnamese mind. The average Vietnamese are courageous and willing to work even under extreme adversities, and they seem second to none in terms of stoicism and resignation.

Formation of the Vietnamese Communities

In Vietnam, the cradle of Vietnamese society was the village, which constituted a separate entity, completed with its own population, customs, even its own deity enshrined in the communal house---a tiny world within the world of Vietnam. The village provided the individual Vietnamese with security in a potentially hostile environment. Within its web of social relations, one's place and duties were exactly defined even in the language itself: the use of the kinship terms as personal pronouns always indicate the social, hierarchical, or age relationship of the two interlocutors.

Therefore, the family, rather than the individual, is the basis unit of society, and harmony in personal relationships is valued more than personal competitiveness, which is equated with selfishness. Because American culture stresses individualism, Americans find it difficult to fully understand the power of kinship for Vietnamese. The family is the fundamental social unit---that is the

primary source of cohesion and continuity---in traditional Vietnamese society. The families ties, enforced by the kinship system, remain the most important source of community, providing support for coping with the turmoil of the era. This fact explains the reason why the policy of refugee dispersion had negative impact on the Vietnamese refugees leading to the urgent need for the formation of ethnic communities.

As years pass by, partly due to the fact that expatriates prefer to flock together to form their own communities, and partly on account of the rigid cold climate in some localities, the Vietnamese refugees have decided to change residence by moving from the northern states to the Sunbelt where the climate suits them much more favorably. The current most important Vietnamese communities are found in Orange County, (the Little Saigon), in San Jose (the Vietnamese Town in Lion Plaza, at the corner of Tully and King road), and the Vietnamese communities in Houston, Texas, and in New Orleans, Louisiana.

Religions

In addition to the traditions, the “Three Religions” (Tam Giao)--- Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism--- have been deeply embedded in the Vietnamese culture and have shaped the lives and institutions of the Vietnamese

people for more than two thousand years.

Buddhism

According to Buddhism, life is a vast sea of suffering, in which man wallows hopelessly. In effect, the vicious circle of existence is renewed in the course of endless reincarnations. The cause of suffering is desire: desire of life, happiness, wealth, power, and so on. If desire were suppressed, the cause of pain would be destroyed. The essence of Buddhist teaching is contained in the concept of Karma, the law of causality: the present existence is conditioned by earlier existences, and will condition those to follow. In order to eliminate desire, one should follow the Four Noble Truths: 1) life is suffering; 2) suffering stems from desire; 3) in order to do away with suffering one must weed out desire; 4) to get rid of desire, one should follow the Eight-Fold Path (a. Right views, b. Right resolution, c. Right speech, d. Right action, e. Right livelihood, f. Right effort, g. Right mindfulness, and h. Right concentration).²²

The basic characteristics of Buddhist culture have left their mark on the Vietnamese civilization; prominent among these cultural characteristics are the following: an attitude of non-attachment, tolerance, compassion, and non-violence.

a. Non-Attachment

Because of their conviction that there are no enduring selves or things in the world, Buddhists do not attach themselves either to ego or to things in the world. Recognizing that impermanence is the mark of this world of suffering existence, they refuse to cling to absurd conceptions of permanence. As a result, they are unruffled by change, face the future with equanimity, and do not lament over what has gone by. A spirit of ready acceptance of life marks most Buddhist cultures.

b. Tolerance

Buddhism is a way of practical realization of the truth of non-suffering attainable by self-discipline and mental purification. Consequently, it is tolerant both of other religions, and of differing individual interpretation of Buddhist teachings. Despite of the many differences found among Buddhists in different countries of the world, they all recognize each other as Buddhists. This recognition lies at the bottom of the respect for individual differences in all spheres of life that is so characteristic of Buddhist culture.

c. Compassion

The compassion demonstrated by Buddha as he traveled around the

countryside teaching the causes and cessation of suffering has permeated all of Buddhism and occupies the central place in the religion, in form of the “Bodhisattava” ideal. Buddha’s compassion embraces not only humankind but also all living creatures. Therefore, according to the Buddhist Commandments, killing is the worse sin that any Buddhist should never commit. This practice has led to the spirit of non-violence.

d. Non-violence

In the twenty-five hundred years since its beginnings, Buddhism has spread throughout Asia and has made its way even to the other continents, claiming over four hundred million followers at the present time. During this time no wars have been fought and no blood shed in the propagation of the teaching. Violence is contrary to the teachings and practice of Buddhism. It is a common conviction of Buddhists everywhere that anger and violence are only appeased and removed by kindness and compassion. Therefore, the Buddhist record on this score is very encouraging, as is seen by the relative lack of war, revolution, or violence in predominantly Buddhist cultures. ²³

Confucianism

Confucianism is called a humanistic social philosophy that answers the

question “How can goodness and happiness be achieved?” by pointing to the principles of action found with humanity itself. The source of these principles is what makes human beings human. Although the characteristics of humanism are numerous, I emphasize the three most important ones, such as benevolence (nhan), righteousness (nghia), and filial piety (hieu)

a. Benevolence (Nhan)

According to Confucius, what makes human beings uniquely human is the benevolence. Confucius often talked about benevolence to his followers, trying to help them to realize its meaning in their own lives. For example, when one of his follower asked what benevolence is, Confucius replied, “It is to love men,” suggesting that our ability to love constitutes the core of our humanity.²⁴

b. Righteousness (Nghia)

Confucius said, “The superior man regards righteousness as the substance of everything. He practices it according to the principle of propriety. He brings it forth in modesty. And he carries it to its conclusion in faithfulness. He is indeed a superior man.” Righteousness informs us the right way of acting in specific situations so that we will be in accord with the benevolence.²⁵

c. Filial Piety (Hieu)

Filial piety is the virtue of reverence and respect for family. First of all, parents are revered because life itself is generated from them. In showing reverence for parents, children should do well in school and in society and make the parents' name known and respected. Filial piety does not consist merely in giving one's parents physical care, but also in bringing them emotional and spiritual richness.²⁶

Taoism

Moreover, Lao Tzu develops the concepts of the total spontaneity of nature, the incessant activity of things, and the underlying of all experiences. He emphasizes that ultimate freedom is achieved through identifying with the Tao of reality and provides arguments for accepting the Taoist Way. Based on the conviction that true happiness is dependent upon transcending the world of ordinary experience and cognition, Taoism advocates followers to identify themselves with the infinity of universe, and to live in harmony with nature.

Taoism stresses the harmony of individual with nature and emphasizes human being's oneness with nature. The notion of "wu-wei"---non-intervention in the natural processes of the universe---was strongly advocated by Lao Tzu. Non-intervention means that one should not try to change the laws of nature but

be content to live with them, to look for pleasure and contentment in nature's quietness and peacefulness.²⁷

These three religions---Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism---have left a deep impact on the Vietnamese culture for more than two thousand years. Such religious concepts and beliefs have been transmitted through the generations to produce an attitude towards life that may be perceived as Vietnamese cultural personality, cultural behavior, customs, and traditions: compassion, tolerance, righteousness, wisdom, filial piety, honesty, loyalty guiding this people in every path of life.

Christianity

Christianity was introduced to the Vietnamese in the sixteenth century. Catholicism and Protestantism are two major branches of Christianity. The differences between the two branches lie in the different interpretations of various teachings in the Bible. Christians are monotheistic, believe in one God, and observe Ten Commandments. Although Christianity was introduced to the Vietnamese society just a few centuries ago, it has also deep impact on the Vietnamese culture.

Major American and Vietnamese Cultural Traits

The Vietnamese refugees' adjustment to the host society and the elders' experience in the United States have been undertaken within the context of the cross-cultural differences between American and Vietnamese cultural personalities and behavior. Thus the Vietnamese refugees need to understand not only their own cultural heritage but also the culture of others, especially the American culture.

The following list summarizes in a comparative basis the American and Vietnamese cultural perspectives.

AMERICAN

VIETNAMESE

Relationship between the self and others

Principle of individual autonomy; self-reliance; but belief in group as a source of creativity.

Principle of mutual dependence as a source of social security; as part of a group.

Man and the World

Master over nature tendency; as an individual separate from nature.

Part of nature; harmony between man and nature.

Personal Values and Philosophy of life

More emphasis on material well being, success, achievement, and competition.

More emphasis on spiritualism, social role and status, knowledge and virtue. Try not to fall in the extreme.

Family Relationship

Family relationship is not always close. Many old-aged parents live in nursing homes or on their own. Young children enjoy a lot of freedom and independence.

Spouses are considered equal legally and socially.

It is very close in Vietnam. Elders live with their children.

Children have to obey and respect their parents and do not have much independence.

The husband is usually superior.

Affection

Kissing between husband and wife, or between lovers in public is acceptable.

Parents and children can kiss each other.

Kissing has to be done in private quarters. No kissing in front of children.

Not at all except babies.

Greeting

Americans exchange cheek kisses to express friendliness.

Vietnamese never exchange cheek kisses.²⁸

Dating and courting

Women can go out alone on dates. Men and women can go to either his or her house to see one another.

Dating can be Dutch

“Good” girls hardly go out on dates. It is considered very bad for a girl to go to a man’s house unless they are engaged.

Man usually pay all the expenses.²⁸

The conflict in adjustment for elderly Vietnamese extends beyond

adapting from a predominantly farming community to a fast spaced technological society, also relates to cultural differences, language barriers, discrimination, and other variables. Knowing the differences between the American and Vietnamese culture may help avoid potential misunderstandings.

CHAPTER IV

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

In this study, through a field study design, I used the survey research method, which combined both questionnaires and interviews for collecting data on a large number of variables in a small sample. The study was exploratory and explanatory in nature. According to the 1990 census, 46.5 percent of more than one million Vietnamese refugees and immigrants in America settled in California, I chose Orange County and San Jose, the two largest resettlement centers for Vietnamese refugees, as sites of field study.

Questionnaire Construction

Questionnaires are essential to and most directly associated with survey research, but they are also widely used in experiments, field research, and other collection data activities. The format of a questionnaire is just as important as the nature and wording of the questions asked. An improperly laid out questionnaire can lead respondents to miss questions, can confuse them about the nature of the data desired. Therefore, I paid much attention to the construction of the questionnaire and to pretest it before delivering it to the respondents. Moreover,

due to the Vietnamese traditional respect for elders, I wrote a cover letter explaining the purpose of this study, delivered the questionnaire to the home of sample respondents, and picked it up later. Hence the response rate was relatively high: 73 percent in Orange County, and 75 percent in San Jose.

Questionnaire Development

In the first section, the questions related to the demographic issues, such as gender, age, education, occupations, the highest position held before 1975, the length of detention in re-education camps. The second section included the questions about the date of arrival in the United States; coming with spouse, with children, or alone; living with spouse, with children, or alone; monthly incomes, source of incomes; rent; church or temple attendance. The third and final section focused on questions related to the respondents' adjustment to the host country:

What were the advantages the Vietnamese elderly refugees enjoyed during the process of integration to the American society?

What were the problems and difficulties they have met during the process of adjustment to the host country?

How did they deal with these problems and difficulties?

What were their suggestions in dealing with such problems and difficulties?

Some were closed-ended questions, but most were open-ended ones. (The Human Subjects-Institutional Review Board Approval Letter, consent form, cover letter, questionnaires are enclosed in the appendix.)

Sampling

Paying attention to the representative principle, I selected Orange County and San Jose, the two largest resettlement centers for the Vietnamese refugees as two sites of study. The study populations were the over-64-years members of Vietnamese Senior Centers in Orange County and in San Jose.

Because many members of the Vietnamese Senior Centers changed their address and did not notify the new address to the Senior Centers, I could not use the random sampling method but the convenience sampling in this study. Based on the list of the members, I picked up 60 elders at each center, contacted them by telephone, explained the purpose of the research, delivered the questionnaire, and collected it a few days later. Home-delivery questionnaires attained higher response rate than mailed questionnaires (from 70 to 80 percent).

The interview was an alternative method of collecting survey data. Rather than asking respondents to read the questionnaires and enter their answer, I had the opportunity to ask the questions orally and record respondents' answers.

From each center, I selected six most representative elders, explained the purpose of the interview, and invited them to participate in this study. I insisted that there were no risks for participation in this study. Any information obtained from this study would remain confidential. If anyone decided to participate, he or she would be free to withdraw his/her consent and to discontinue participation at any time without prejudice. Before setting up the schedule for the interview, I asked each participant to read the consent form carefully before signing it. And I was notified that the Human Subject-Institutional Review Board had already approved my request to use human subjects in this study.

The shortest length of the interview lasted at least 60 minutes, and the longest, three hours. Hence the average of the interview was two hours. I tape recorded each interview and transcribed it later.

Data Collecting

I collected data from home delivery questionnaires and in-depth interviews. The data reported in this thesis were gathered from a sample of senior Vietnamese aged 65 and over residing in Orange County and in San Jose.

Data processing

After each interview, I rewrote my notes as soon as possible. I used my

notes as stimulus to recreate as many details of the day's experiences as possible with the purpose to produce typed notes as comprehensive and detailed as I would have taken in the first place. These typed notes represented a chronological record of my observations in the project, including the notations of the dates and times I made them. Thus I kept one complete set of notes in this form. It would serve as a master-file to create the chronological order of events in the future.

Record Keeping

It was essential that the coding operation would be amenable to data processing in order to evaluate the content analysis data quantitatively. The end product of my coding had to be numerical. The record keeping clearly distinguished between my units of analysis and my units of observation.

Data Analysis

Finally, I analyzed the collected data for the purpose of drawing conclusions reflecting the interests that initiated the inquiry. I used causal analyses to explain the causes leading many elderly Vietnamese refugees to feel sad, lonely, and helpless. The final stage of the research process would be to communicate the findings to the social services, mental health clinics, voluntary

organizations, Vietnamese communities, and other related agencies.

In summary, the study was undertaken through four steps:

Step 1. Home-delivery questionnaires to sixty refugees and in-depth interviews with six elders in Orange County took two months, from December 1998 to January 1999.

Step 2. Home-delivery questionnaires to sixty refugees and in-depth interviews with six elders in San Jose took two months, from February 1999 to March 1999.

Step3. Data processing and analyzing lasted five months, from April to August 1999.

Step 4. Writing the thesis took four months, from September to December 1999.

I completed the project in thirteen months.

Limitations

Although the survey research had clear advantages, there were some limitations:

a. One of the limitations related to the incomplete list of the Senior Vietnamese Center. Some of the elders did not register, and others changed the

address but did not inform the administrative committee of the Senior Center. Therefore, a random sampling was almost infeasible, and I used a convenience sampling in this study. A convenience sampling cannot provide the equal probability of selection method (EPSEM), and the members of targeted population do not have the same probability of being selected.

b. The Vietnamese possess an inwardness, a well-developed ability to keep their true feelings hidden. Many elderly Vietnamese refugees suffered from mental distress, such as anxiety, grief, depression, but they rarely complained, except with few close relatives. Thus it was really difficult for an interviewer to know their true feelings, unless he or she was a close friend of the interviewee.

c. Finally, the standard error is also a function of the sample size---an inverse function. As the sample size decreases the standard error increases. The relatively small sample size used in this study could increase the standard error.

CHAPTER V

FINDINGS

The elderly Vietnamese refugees' experience in America has been an on going process of adjustment to the American society. It may take time for the elders to adjust to the host country and to get back to their feet socially and economically.

Findings

Many problems and concerns affecting individual progress toward positive adjustment were found, however, most seemed to reflect the stress and frustration experienced as a natural consequence of the continued inability to participate successfully in the American way of life. There were other concerns as well, which seemed indicative of a feeling of sadness, loneliness, and helplessness.

Nonetheless a sense of apprehension, insecurity, and stress was readily apparent in most households. The elderly interviewees were not generally optimistic about their ability to make a new life for themselves in the United States. Some said that they did not feel liked by Americans, and more than a few cases they gave irrefutable examples of racist or perhaps hostile gesture which

had been directed toward them. Several elderly interviewees related feeling of uselessness and helplessness in this country as if nothing depended on whether they existed.

The data of this research were obtained from a convenience sampling of members of Vietnamese Senior Centers members in Orange County and in San Jose, and the interviews with selected elderly Vietnamese. In Orange County, 60 questionnaires were delivered to the samples and 44 were collected. The rate of response was 73 percent. In San Jose, 60 questionnaires were delivered and 45 collected. The rate of response was 75 percent.

Table I

Gender								
Orange County					San Jose			
Men	%	Women	%		Men	%	Women	%
35	80	9	20		33	74	12	26
No. 44 Percentage: 100%					No.45 Percentage: 100%			

Table I showed men outnumbered women by almost five to one. This high sex ratio could be explained by the fact that the study population encompassed mostly the category of "humanitarian operation" refugees: the long-held-in-reeducation-camp prisoners. They were high-ranking civil servants and military of the former Saigon government and were mostly men.

In addition, before 1975 in South Vietnam, most men were the only rice-winners and usually fulfill adequately the role of the sole economic providers for their family. Women's role often consisted of rearing children, keeping the household money, regulating everyday expenditures, and paying attention to the harmony of the family. Therefore, women occupied about 20 percent of the working force. These facts explained that few women worked outside of their houses and, thus, few were detained in the re-education camps after the fall of the South Vietnamese government in April 1975.

Table II.

Group Age									
	Orange County					San Jose			
Age Group	Men	%	Women	%		Men	%	Women	%
65-69	17	38%	5	11%		9	20%	4	8%
70-74	19	42%	3	9%		8	18%	8	18%
75-85						10	22%	6	14%
	No. 44 Percentage: 100%					No.45 Percentage: 100%			

Table II showed that, in Orange County, in the group age from 65 to 69, 38 percent were men, and 11 percent, women. In the group age from 70 to 74, men occupied 42 percent, and women, only 9 percent. There was none in the group age from 75 years old and over.

In San Jose, on the other hand, the distribution of respondents seemed relatively equal in the three groups. In the group age from 65 to 69, men comprised 18 percent, and women, 8 percent. In the group age from 70 to 74, men and women were equal at 18 percent. In the group age from 75 years old and over, men attained 22 percent, and women, 14 percent.

In the group age from 75 years old and over, there was none in Orange

County, whereas in San Jose, 36 percent of the respondents aged 75 and over. These data did not mean that people in San Jose lived longer than those in Orange County, but that it would be a mere coincidence.

In general, the Vietnamese refugees, young and old, paid attention to the adjustment to the host country. But the adaptation to the host society is usually proportional to the age. The young refugees adjust to the new society quickly, but the elders usually have met problems during the process of adjustment because the elderly refugees have been characterized by a deeply-rooted loyalty to traditional beliefs and a defensive conservative reaction to factors in American life threatening their own values.

Table III

Occupations									
	Orange County					San Jose			
Occupations	Men	%	Women	%		Men	%	Women	%
Civil Servants	12	27%	4	9%		7	15%	7	15%
Military	21	48%	4	9%		12	27%	5	11.5%
Liberal Professions	1	2.5%	2	4.5%		9	20%	5	11.5%
	No. 44 Percentage: 100%					No.45 Percentage: 100%			

Table III showed that the civil servants took up 36%, whereas military got almost 57% of the respondents in Orange County. In San Jose, former civil servants occupied 31%, and military officers, almost 38%. The military respondents outnumbered civil-servant respondents could be explained by the fact that the South Vietnamese were fighting against the Communists invasion for three decades after the end of the World War II, from 1945 to 1975, until the fall of the Saigon government on April 30, 1975. Hence, at that time, the military personnel reached 1.4 million compared to 800,000 civil servants.

Table IV

Length of Detention									
	Orange County					San Jose			
Detention Length	Men	%	Women	%		Men	%	Women	%
5 – 9 Years	6	13.5%	1	2%		4	9%	1	2%
10 – 14 Years	14	31.5%	5	11%		14	31%	2	4%
15 – 20 Years	15	34%				10	22%		
	No. 35 Percentage: 79%					No.30 Percentage: 67%			

In Orange County, of the 44 respondents 35 were reported to be detainees, whereas, in San Jose, 30 of the 45 respondents were reported to be

detainees. The number of respondents outnumbered the number of detainees because some of the respondents fled Vietnam before, or right after, the fall of the Saigon government in 1975 and were lucky enough not to be held in re-education camps. Most of the respondents, however, endured great hardship in different re-education camps for a long period of time.

According to the data from Orange County, 14 men and 5 women were detained from 10 to 14 years, and 15 men were imprisoned from 15 to 20 years. For those respondents in San Jose, 14 men and 2 women were detained from 10 to 14 years, and 10 men were imprisoned from 15 to 20 years. Some of the interviewees said that they did not know how they could have survived after the long period of hard labor, starvation, and slow death in different re-education camps in North Vietnam. Others believed that their survival was a miracle.

There is some correlation between the length of detention and the adjustment to the American society. The data revealed that the longer the length of detention in reeducation camps, the harder the adjustment to the host society. And the longer the detention, the more likely these political prisoners have serious mental health problems.

Table V

Incomes									
	Orange County					San Jose			
	Men	%	Women	%		Men	%	Women	%
Salary	11	25%	5	12%		10	22%	5	11%
Welfare	20	45%	8	18%		18	40%	12	26%
	No. 44 Percentage: 100%					No.45 Percentage: 100%			

Table V showed that, in Orange County, of 44 respondents, 16 (37%) had jobs and lived on their own, and 28 (63%) needed public assistance. Similarly, in San Jose, of 45 respondents, 15 (34%) joined the work force, and 30 (66%) depended on welfare. Most of the respondents who needed some types of public assistance said that they felt ashamed to be dependent on welfare. However, because of their poor health after being held in different re-education camps for a long period of time and having suffered numerous diseases, especially mental health problems, they could not find jobs although they wanted to work. But the fact that 37% of the respondents in Orange County and 34% in San Jose were participating in the labor market at the age of 65 and over was considered as an encouraging sign indicating their willingness to work,

despite their old age, poor health, and lack of English.

Table VI

Living Arrangement									
	Orange County					San Jose			
	Men	%	Women	%		Men	%	Women	%
With Spouse	16	36%	2	4.5%		15	33.5%	3	6.5%
With Children	5	11%	2	4.5%		2	4.5%	2	4.5%
Living Alone	14	33%	5	11%		17	38%	6	13%
	No. 44 Percentage: 100%					No.45 Percentage: 100%			

Table VI illustrated that, in Orange County, 18 respondents (41%) lived with their spouse, 7 (16%), with their children, and 19 respondents (43%) lived alone. Likewise, in San Jose, 18 respondents (40%) cohabited with their spouse, 4 (9%), with their children, and 23 respondents (51%) lived alone.

The rates of the respondents who lived alone (43% in Orange County and 51% in San Jose) were relatively high and constituted one of the main causes of their feelings of sadness, loneliness, and helplessness. But many elders who lived with their children also reported similar feelings because, while their

children were working, they spent all day at home alone with nothing to do.

Table VII

Political Participation and Church Attendance

Orange County						
	Many Times		Some Times		No Participation	
Political Participation	1	2%	23	52%	20	46%
Church Attendance	6	14%	26	59%	12	27%
San Jose						
	Many Times		Some Times		No Participation	
Political Participation	2	4%	19	42%	24	54%
Church Attendance	17	38%	27	60%	1	2%

According to Table VII, a great number of respondents (46% in Orange County and 54% in San Jose) did not participate in political activities organized by Vietnamese Communities or other political organizations, whereas 27% of respondents in Orange County and only 2% in San Jose did not attend religious ceremonies. These data indicated that many elderly refugees lost confidence in some Vietnamese political leaders and have been seeking the spiritual support from the clergy.

Indeed, there were numerous competing Vietnamese Associations in large resettlement centers, due to the lack of political cohesion and to the rivalry and competition with one another. These regrettable facts reflected a deep, historically rooted suspicion of formal organizations: Cruel foreign domination followed by the long years of war, and finally a period of Communist rule, had engendered widespread antipathy toward political institutions.

Table VIII

Sadness, Loneliness, and Helplessness									
	Orange County					San Jose			
	Men	%	Women	%		Men	%	Women	%
Feel Sad	25	56%	9	21%		24	53%	16	35.5%
Helpless..									
Don't Feel Sad...	7	16%	3	7%		3	7%	2	4.5%

Table VIII showed that, in Orange County, 34 respondents (77%), and in San Jose, 40 respondents (89%) felt sad, lonely, and helpless, although only 19 and 23 respondents lived alone respectively in Orange County and San Jose. These data showed that not only those who lived alone felt sad, lonely, and helpless, but also the elders living with their children had similar feelings.

Table IX

Causes of Loneliness									
	Orange County					San Jose			
	Men	%	Women	%		Men	%	Women	%
1. Culture Differences	31	70%	7	16%		27	60%	15	33%
2. Language Barriers	32	73%	8	18%		25	55	16	36%
3. Lack Familial Support	18	41%	5	11%		26	58%	8	18%
4. Abuse & Negligence	20	45%	5	11%		25	55%	15	28%
5. Lon g Detention	21	48%	3	7%		22	49%	4	9%
6. Sickness	20	45%	6	14%		23	51%	9	20%
7. Lack Transportation	11	25%	8	18%		15	33%	7	16%
8.High Rent	19	43%	7	16%		10	22%	4	9%

Table IX indicated some important causes making the elderly Vietnamese refugees to feel sad, lonely, and helplessness.

1. Cultural Differences

Seventy percent of the respondents in Orange County and sixty percent of respondents in San Jose indicated that cultural differences were one of the most important causes leading to the feeling of sadness, loneliness, and helplessness. In fact, life in Vietnam was based on a “rice culture,” attuned to rhythms of the seasons of planting and harvesting. For thousand years, the technology of the water buffalo was stable. One’s ancestors, the source of life, had planted and reaped on this land. Their graves stood in the rice fields and their spirits continued to watch over the family. Individual death did not mark an end. Here the past and present merged and there existed the sense of a natural harmony between man and the land, between the living and their ancestor.²⁹

The cradle of Vietnamese society was the village, which provided the individual with security in a potentially hostile environment. Within its web of social relations, one’s place and duties were exactly defined even in the language itself: the use of kinship terms as personal pronouns always the social hierarchy, or age relationship of the two interlocutors. In the past, few people left the village of their birth, for to do so was to leave one’s place in the world, to lose touch with one’s ancestors’ interactions, and to enter a moral, legal and spiritual

touch with one's ancestors' interactions, and to enter a moral, legal and spiritual void.

Although the long foreign domination, the destructive war from 1945 to 1975 devastated villages, forced a great number of rural people to leave their farms, and loosed the family ties, the Vietnamese always tried to preserve their culture and tradition. Therefore, the abrupt and unprepared transplantation from a "rice culture" in Vietnam to a "high-tech culture" in America made elderly Vietnamese to feel isolated, sad, lonely, and helpless. Many problems and concerns affecting individual progress toward positive adjustment were found, however, most of which seemed to reflect the stress and frustration experienced as a natural consequence of the continued inability to participate successfully in the American way of life.

In general, a sense of apprehension, insecurity and stress was readily apparent in most households. Elderly respondents and interviewees were not generally optimistic about their ability to make a new life for themselves in the United States. Interviewees mentioned perceiving an attitude of indifference and disrespect toward the elderly in this country, and described this attitude as very different from the way it had been in Vietnam, where the elders were the trusted

and respected leaders of the community. Several elderly interviewees related feeling useless in this country, as if nothing depended on whether they existed. The circumstances of the elderly seemed to add to the sense of apprehension and insecurity for the entire group of refugees, who related fear of being put into nursing homes and dread at the prospect of having to grow old in this country.

In addition, the cult of ancestors, the attachment to the native site of their tombs and the “dialog” with them in front of their altars were missing in the United States and other Western countries. This explained much of the loneliness, guilt, and incapacity felt by many elderly Vietnamese because they could not have communication with their ancestors. The cult of ancestors also explained the intergenerational conflicts: parents felt that their children raised in the Western countries would not worship them after their death as well as their ancestors.

Mrs. Thuy, a pharmacist, who was detained in re-education camps for fourteen years and arrived in the United State in 1994, said that leaving her native land was heart-breaking loss, but living in a strange country, with alien culture and life-style, seemed unbearable to her. The cultural shock has been severe, and she was not well prepared for the great differences between the

American culture and her time-honored traditions and values.

For the Vietnamese elderly refugees in America, she said, life is unbearable because it is not the way life used to be. In Vietnam, when she returned home from her office, she had family members, friends, relatives, neighbors, and the sentimentality: she felt secure, relaxed physically and emotionally, and at ease. Here, on the contrary, she feels lonely, sad, empty, helpless, and isolated.

Another elder, Mr. Pham, a former high-ranking military officer, 72 years old, asserted that the Vietnamese refugees in America, both young and old, faced the intergenerational tensions among them. At the root of these tensions were growing cultural schisms between the generations as well as a decline in the power and authority of family elders. And the elders became more and more anxious and helpless watching the traditional cultural values forgotten, the parental authority over the children eroded.

He said that that the American culture and laws did not support the right of parents to discipline their children and weakened the strength of their efforts to enforce appropriate values and norms on the young. The absence of support for parental rights was dramatically highlighted by the situations in which

schoolteachers or police officers directly intervened in conflicts between children and their parents.

Another Vietnamese elder recounted a tragic story related to the misunderstanding of the Vietnamese traditional health beliefs. Some Vietnamese refugees used folk treatment either concurrently or before seeking Western medical care. It was the case in which Mr. Liem made use of the folk treatment “cao gio,” “coin rubbing” with hot balm oil that produced ecchymotic marks on the chest, back, and neck of his son to treat his flu. When his son went to school, the teacher saw the marks on his neck and informed the police. Mr. Liem was arrested and detained in jail for child abuse, and he committed suicide. If the schoolteachers and police officers had known the Vietnamese folk treatment still popular among the Vietnamese refugees coming from rural areas, such a tragic story would have been avoided. It is reasonable to anticipate that misunderstanding would occur whenever two cultures coexist. However, I hope that such child abuse accusations and subsequent suicide could be avoided in the future with some understanding of the Vietnamese tradition.

Of course, the Vietnamese refugees would adjust to the host society, but the cost of adjustment would vary with the situations involved. The sensitive

situations require awareness of the basic values, beliefs and traditions that have been imprinted for an entire lifetime. For many elderly Vietnamese refugees, who were educated, and impregnated with their culture and traditions for almost an entire lifetime, it would be difficult to adjust to a new society. For the social, educational, clinical agencies' personnel, the knowledge about the Vietnamese cultural heritage, even if sketchy, should further help them to understand and to be more tolerant and more compassionate toward the elderly refugees and to treat them as persons culturally worthy of attention.

2. Language Barriers

Ninety-one percent of the respondents in Orange County and 81 percent in San Jose thought that language barriers were one of the most important causes leading them to be lonely, helpless, and isolated. In fact, once resettled in a new country, refugees are obliged to adjust behaviorally to the host society. They are without viable alternatives to acceptance and adaptation in the American context. For many, an essential part of the adaptation process would be the acquisition of the host language.

The Interagency Task Force on Indochinese Refugees (IATF) in 1980 reported that 36.7 percent of the first-wave refugees had working knowledge of

knowledge of English, and 27.0 percent of the refugees possessed no English skills. But the second-wave refugees were composed of more diverse groups, including professionals as well as people from rural areas. About 60 percent of them did not have English communication fluency.

Many refugees who had no English skills could not find jobs, and they often experienced high rates of unemployment. Stein identified initial English language ability as one of the important factors that have restrained Vietnamese refugees in their pursuit of former occupational status.³⁰

Writing and speaking English fluently has been the primary condition for the success in America. Hence, the rate of acquisition of the new language has appeared to be more important. In general, the rate of foreign language learning is inversely proportional to age: the younger the individual, the faster he or she learns the foreign language. This, then, would be a paradoxical situation that the elderly refugees encounter every day. They want to learn English as quickly as possible, but they are too old to remember much of what they have learned. They want to work, but they did not have marketable skills to find the jobs. And because of the lack of English communication skills, they cannot get adequate vocational training.

vocational training.

Moreover, in their daily life, the elderly refugees have also meet all sorts of difficulties due to their lack of the proficiency in English language skills. One of the elderly interviewee says that the fact he cannot speak English constitutes one of the most important problems and barriers he has met in his daily life. For example, he cannot fill out paper, and he is unable to answer the phone. And if he should be sick, he would not know what to do because oftentimes his relatives live far away. In Vietnam, he had relatives nearby, and if something happened, they would get together to help him. Here in America, his relatives are too far away from him, so he feels insecure, sad, and lonely.

Another respondent, Mrs. Oanh, an agronomist, indicates that she can read and understand English, but when she speaks English usually people do not understand due to her strong accent. Hence, she finds it difficulty for asking information over the telephone. Once, she called a pet shop for asking about the animal food, but the man in charge at the pet shop said, "I am sorry I don't understand what you're saying." Even an educated person like Mrs. Oanh has met language barriers in this host country.

Others also complain about their poor English speaking, leading to the

difficulties in getting jobs. For example, Mr. Trinh, a former ARVN colonel, emphasizes the stress of living in America: There is too much to do in learning how to survive and not enough time to do it. People wake up early, work all day, return home tired, then get up early the next day. So do Americans, but they do not have to learn a new language at the same time. For elderly Vietnamese refugees, this continuous effort to improve English communication skills sometimes creates strain leading to feelings of stress, depression, and loneliness.

Some interviewees mention that the elderly Vietnamese refugees in America not only have a decline in their social status but also meet greater difficulties in communicating and dealing with people and institutions of the host society. In many households, due to their English fluency, children have assumed an important role in dealing with institutions outside the ethnic community on behalf of the household---a situation that can result in the erosion of parental authority. This loss of parental and social status, coupled with a deepening cultural gap between the young and the old, has been an important and contributing factor leading to intergeneration conflicts.

3. Lack of Familial Support

The family is a central institution in Vietnamese life, and the fundamental

Vietnamese society. Differing profoundly from the American nuclear family, the Vietnamese family should be perceived as “a superorganic unit existing across generations past, present, and future.”³¹

A traditional Vietnamese family, in particular, was generally a multigenerational, sizeable, extended grouping, with a network of precisely defined loyalties and responsibilities. All of the members were bound by personal obligations for mutual support and dependency. And in general, they tried to live up to those expectations. Thus, the family has provided one of the most needed emotional support and protection functioning in fact as a safety net for all family members, besides the benefits of an economic cooperative.

Even in America, the Vietnamese kinship system continues to be the important factor that strongly binds family members together. Kinship ties function not only as an economic safety net but also as a source of loans and business capital. Pooling or sharing of resources, concentrated within the household or co-residential unit, has been, in fact, one of the central economic practices by which Vietnamese Americans work to survive and realize economic aspirations.

To the extent that most people have high hope for their family, difficulties

are bound to appear when these expectations are not adequately responded to in real life. Those, for example, who miss their family and cannot avail themselves of any such support feel this absence very intensely, with a profound sense of loss or of deprivation. Also when no help is forthcoming from the family, the frustration is far deeper than if there has not been such hope in the first place. The Table VI (page 55) reveals the sad fact that 43 percent of respondents in Orange County and 51 percent in San Jose spend their later life in America alone as a result of their family dislocation during the period of time they were detained in reeducation camps.

Indeed, since many of these respondents were former high-ranking government officials and military officers, they were detained in different reeducation camps for a long period of time in different reeducation camps, which almost ruined their physical and mental health. Because of their poor health, their advanced age, and the lack of familial support, when they arrived in the United States, they could not get a job, felt insecure, minimized their socialization, and became despaired. Those who did not speak English stayed most of the time at home, and became self-isolated, depressed, and withdrawn.

For those who stay together as a family, life, however, is not always in a

bed of roses without problems. That is, for example, prolonged closeness often creates friction, compulsory intimacy may generate irritation, and constant expectations of mutual dependency may turn into hateful obligations and unwelcome burden. What was first seen as the ultimate solution to most problems of the exile, in time becomes a mixed blessing one may desire and resent at the same time. Children neglect and abuse their parents may be considered as one of the forms of resentment.

4. Neglect and Abuse

In Vietnam, the extended family was an important part of the social life and social networks for the Vietnamese. In the traditional family context, the elderly gave advice and direction, but also paid attention to the well-being of family members. Usually three or even four generations--- grandparents, parents, children, grandchildren, sometimes uncles and aunts--- lived under the same roof, had the common familial budget, and constituted a cohesive and cooperative family under the leadership of a patriarch. Everybody was able to receive help from each other. When one was ill, or one was going outside and doing some business for the family, the grandfather or uncle, or aunt was looking after the children, and especially the grandmother was happy to have an eye on

her grandchildren. When the grandparents were old, their children or grandchildren became their company, and they were happy with them. The whole family lived under the patronage of the grandparents. This warm ambiance reflected the cohesiveness, closeness, and happiness of the traditional family.

The image of the “golden age” and its loss have been seen as a consequence of American life by several elderly interviewees. They saw the problems in their life as being similar to that of American elders. They asserted that here they were grateful for even the smallest attention their children and grandchildren gave them. The study revealed that the life of many Vietnamese elderly who lived with their children was almost similar to those who lived alone—sad, lonely, and unhappy because when their children went to work, they stayed at home alone. They said that every day they were waiting for family members to return home from work or school, waiting for the chance to see some relatives or friends to come to talk to them. Particularly, many elderly women were bored and isolated, because they did not dare to go out being afraid of getting lost.

Old people are dependent and need someone to take care of them. Normal aging processes lead to increased dependencies among elderly. Economic

dependency can result from their inability to get a job because of old age. As physical changes such as hearing and sight loss occur, the older persons may become dependent on someone else for transportation. As aging processes, a person becomes less mobile, especially after being held in reeducation camps for a long period of time, there tend to be fewer people in one's environment for social support. Loss of contact with others because of hearing and sight impairments, or lack of transportation may make an older person more dependent on certain people. Family members and friends may become only source of social contacts.

Even though many elderly Vietnamese refugees require minimal assistance, the prevalence of family care giving is at a high level. One consequence of high stress level in care giving is abuse and neglect. Table IX shows that 31 percent of respondents in Orange County and 37 percent in San Jose say that they have endured some kind of abuse or neglect including physical abuse, neglect, verbal abuse, and psychological mistreatment. The profile of the elderly who are abused, particularly the females, indicates that they have greater needs than the unabused ones and that they lack alternatives to meet these needs.

All care-giving situations are not detrimental to the elderly and their

families. The research also indicates that the majority of familial care to an elderly member is provided by a female, regardless of the blood relationship. The elderly are care recipients but also providers in such areas as companionship, child care, and family income. Imbalance in the exchange is more likely to occur as declining health and need for increasing care of the older person. The impact of care giving on all family members can be profound without additional family supports when care giving demands increase.

5. Long Detention

Forty-eight percent of respondents in Orange County and 49 percent in San Jose think that the length of detention in reeducation camps is an important factor leading to their sadness, loneliness, and helplessness. In fact, one of the Communist malignant policies toward the former South Vietnamese government officials and military officers was to destroy their resistance at any price. To carry out this policy, the Communist authorities sent them to the reeducation camps located in remote areas of Cao Bang, Lang Son, and Yen Bai provinces, at the borders between Vietnam and China, where they endured hard labor, starvation, and slow death.

Indeed, as Mr. Lam, an ex-ARVN colonel said that the dinner was cooked

in a common kitchen for the whole subdivision, but even the pets could not eat this kind of meal under ordinary circumstance. However, because they were always hungry, they ate all kinds of food the kitchen provided. The dinner composed one bowl of rotten rice, some spoiled vegetable cooked with no meat or fat but just salted water. Minor infractions of camp rules, such as fighting, cooking, gambling, brought one week in “connex” confinement. In the connex box, (a steel container) a prisoner was very uncomfortable---in the daytime, the sun and heat made the atmosphere suffocating; at night, it was cold. The prisoner confined in the connex received a half of one ration of food and a half-size milk can of water a day.

For serious misbehavior such as resistance to political discussion or disrespect for the cadres, Mr. Lam continued, the related prisoner was put in underground-black hole for one or two weeks. The prisoner was given a third ration of food, urinated and defecated in improvised containers left in the black hole such as nylon bags, and cohabited with rats, lice, and cockroaches. The cadres usually said that no one could survive after being confined in the black hole for more than four weeks.

He also asserted that those who attempted to escape the reeducation

camps were to be put to death. Three young officers who planned to escape were caught and put in black holes in the middle of the night. The following morning, the guards selected one prisoner from each subdivision to dig three graves. At 8:00 a.m. the next day, the loud-speakers blared, informing the three evaders were convicted; and all three were sentenced to death by firing squad.

This tragedy had a deep impact on the prisoners, who felt very sad for several weeks. Many prisoners made comments and speculated about this event. The cadres held a special political session to discuss the incident; then the prisoners were supposed to comment on their own feelings and impressions of the event. And certainly, everyone lied. Although the event had a very profound effect on them, some prisoners could not bear the heavy burden of the starvation, hard labor, and slow death any longer, escaped, and were shot and killed. Another interviewee, Mr. Phuong, an ex-ARVN colonel, recounted that most of the time, due to their hunger, the prisoners talked about cooking and exchanged recipes. When they had some leisure time after long hours of hard labor, they go out to pick and eat herbs or various kinds of wild, edible vegetables. Other took bits of barbed wire to make into mouse-traps for rats as big as a man's forearm. Those who caught them were very happy to host their friends to a lunch or

dinner of rat: very horrible! All these rats were dirty from living in the latrines.

He indicated that some of the prisoners caught swallows with fishing line. These birds also were dirty, for they ate the larvae in the latrines. The eaters of rats began to act very strangely. They caught and ate chameleons and crickets. They went to the kitchen to collect rotten garbage to eat. Due to the permanent hunger, they ate unsuitable food, intoxicating food, food kept for many days, which was inedible, and they usually had colic and dysentery. They went to the camp medic for medicine, and the nurse prescribed various kinds of herbs---for example, when they had colic, the nurse prescribed young buds of guava.

Those who entered into virgin forest to cut lumber and bamboo encountered snakes. But the most dangerous enemy of all was hunger; they were ravenous every day. Therefore, one way or other, they tried to find and eat any kind of food that they judged edible for humans. Inevitably, some of them got poisoned by eating unknown wild fruits. The most common disease was constipation resulting from eating wild banana, which had too much tannin that it caused constipation first, and later led to dysentery, which killed many of the prisoners.

6. Diseases

The sicknesses that these prisoners endured consisted of physical diseases and mental health problems.

a. Physical Diseases

Dr. Binh, a former assistant of the minister of public health, said that the most common and serious disease was beriberi, caused by the deficiency of vitamin B-1. In many instances, this turned out to be very serious. Some prisoners were almost paralyzed; many older prisoners could not stand on their feet anymore and crawled like an animal. Others got strange disease after eating unknown wild fruits. It made the men's liver swell very quickly, within two weeks, the sick persons' belly became bigger and bigger like that of pregnant women; then suddenly they died.

The second common sickness was malaria. He asserted that about 80 percent of the long-held reeducation prisoners got malaria, which deteriorated their liver in the long range and became chronic. If the patients were not adequately treated, they could die within a few years.

Associated with the severe starvation and hard labor, tuberculosis sowed terror among the inmates. This is one of the most contagious diseases, which spread rapidly in the crowded ambiance and lack of sanitary arrangements. Due

to their old ages and to their poor health, many elders die with tuberculosis especially during the winter.

Other common diseases were dysentery, pneumonia, hepatitis B and C, which destroyed the prisoners' health. Within a few years of being held in reeducation camps located in unhealthy areas, they lost weight, suffered various diseases; and in the long range, due to the lack of medicine, they became weaker and weaker, and many died later on. Those who survived from these sicknesses might become handicapped, as the result of a furtive policy.

This malignant policy not only destroyed physical health of the prisoners, but also undermined their mental health as well. In fact, during the first part of their detention in the North Vietnam, from 1975-1979, their relatives were not allowed to visit them. The cadres had very strict instructions to check all of their correspondences. Letters to their families had to be very short. They were prohibited from using foreign words or indicating where they had been sent. Even so, they tried to inform their families by tricks. For example, one of the prisoners wrote that he had met Thang, a friend of his family. Since this man was a native of Yen Bai, so his wife might realize where he was detained.

Mr. Truong, a former director of the public work department, says that

one day, the prisoners went out to work in a remote village of Yen Binh and met two groups of prisoners who had been sent to this area in the early 1950s. The first group consisted of the Catholic natives of Quynh Luu District, Nghe An province. In 1953, these people revolted against the Communists. After their revolt was crushed, those suspected of inciting and participating in the revolt were sent to the North, where they would remain for the rest of their days.

The second group, he continued, was composed of Vietnamese soldiers of the French Army who were exiled to this remote part of the country after the partition of Vietnam into two political entities based on the Geneva Agreement of 1954. They were so naïve that they did not go to the South when they had the chance. They too would never go home.

Other captured soldiers of the French Foreign Legion were not repatriated after 1954. They were forced to remain in North Vietnam. Not until 1975 was an arrangement made that allowed them to return to their native country in Europe.

After talking with these groups, the political prisoners assumed that they, too, had been exiled to the far North forever and also would never be allowed to return home. This unhappy assumption led some of them to commit suicide;

others became depressed. In addition to the hard labor, starvation, and slow death, this assumption deteriorated their mental health rapidly. Therefore, those who survived from reeducation camps not only suffered various physical diseases but especially mental health problems. As a result, the Communist cruel policy toward the ex-civil servants and military officers of the former South Vietnamese government had disastrous impact for the rest of their life, undermined their physical and mental health, and constituted the major barriers for them to adjust to the American society.

b. Mental Health Problems

The mental health problems became serious among the elderly Vietnamese refugees due to the traumas of long detention in reeducation and to that of the resettlement in the United States. Here, in a foreign country, almost everything is new for them: from things as trivial as food or transportation, to subjects as complex as language or social organizations. All must be learned and mastered or at least made familiar with for the sake of self-preservation. The fight for survival has been hard enough for newcomers against external odds: economic difficulties, social handicaps, and cultural differences. All these factors have had severe stress on the elders leading to isolation, loneliness, depression,

and withdrawal.

In fact, in 1989, the Bureau of Research and Training in the Pennsylvania Office of Mental health conducted a series of activities designed to assess the current status of mental health problems among the Indochinese refugees. The study indicated that the Voluntary Agencies identified over one-half (56%) of the refugees with mental health problems, whereas the public mental health sector, represented by the Community Mental Health Centers, saw approximately one of twenty clients (4%).³²

Results of data collected through the survey and site visits clearly indicated that the Indochinese refugees as a whole are loathing to admit the existence of mental health problems within their communities. Results of site visits, as well as the survey, indicated that the refugees were not usually seeking out the services of the Community Mental Health Centers. One response to the questionnaire provided a cogent example. In fact, the Indochinese refugees were unwilling to admit the existence of the problems and reluctant to utilize the modern forms of mental health treatment.

The group of Vietnamese who came to the United States had significant differences among them, particularly in terms of social standing, rural-urban

background, region of prior inhabitation and religion. Considering the complex of attitudes, values, and beliefs which Vietnamese possess toward mental health problems and treatment, it is understandable that the Vietnamese as a group are reluctant to utilize the forms of mental health treatment traditionally offered in the United States.

Dr. Huynh, a psychiatrist at the Santa Clara Mental Health Center asserted that the primary mental health problems exhibited by Vietnamese in the United States have been depression, isolation, and withdrawal.³³ The stress of adjustment appears to have resulted in few suicides or new cases of chronic psychosis, and acute forms of psychopathology have been primarily of a transitory nature.

Obviously, there is a mismatch between the demands and the offers of services. Why the discrepancy, where are the points of discrepancy are questions which stand at the heart of the service delivery issue and the basic factors which determine the effectiveness of any service program. The problems of adjustment experienced by the Vietnamese are considered as a way to address some of the issues concerning the needs, demands and offers of mental health services in regard to this particular population. Problems of isolation, role change, status

upheaval, family dislocation, social disruption, as well as feeling of humiliation, fear, and anger are so much stressful for the refugees.

Therefore, from the key informant interviews, it was reported that the stress of uprooting and cultural adjustment led to emotional difficulties among the refugees. However, slightly more than one-half of the respondents asserted that they identified more clients in this year than in previous years. Anxiety, isolation, depression, and marital conflict have been also frequently reported problems among refugees. All these forms of mental health problems have constituted a kind of hindrance for elderly refugees to adjust to the American society.

7. Lack of Mobility

Another factor that makes life of the elderly Vietnamese refugees in America difficult is the lack of transportation. In fact, in Vietnam, the elderly spent a lot of their time with family, relatives, and close friends. One interviewee described the life of an elderly friend to illustrate both life of the elderly and the ideal situation for the man as he ages: "There was a man with five children who all loved him very much and respected him. They showed their love by competing to see who would have him stay with them. They begged him to stay

with them, and usually he never got to go home. The ideal is to be wanted by others to have you around.” If the elderly wanted to go elsewhere, either their children provided transportation or they used a taxi cab.

But in America, lack of transportation becomes a big problem. As Mrs. Nga said, “I feel so lonely when my children are away from the house. Sometimes, at the weekend, I ask my son to drive me to the pagoda for attending a religious ceremony; he says that he is very tired, and the pagoda is far away. In Vietnam, I could go anywhere I wanted to go. I called a taxi cab.”

Another female respondent, Mrs. Nguyen, said that the transportation in America is a nightmare for her family. One time her husband had an appointment at the Medical Center; and his friend was supposed to pick him up and to take him to the hospital. But at the last minute, his friend had a cold and suggested that her husband take the bus. Because her husband did not have any choice, he took the bus, got lost. Since he did not speak English, could not communicate with the bus driver, and did not get off the bus at the last station, the bus driver asked a police officer to help her husband to go home. The police took him to the Vietnamese community center; with the help of a translator, he could ask her husband’s address and then drove him home. Since that incident, her husband

and she are very afraid of using public transportation, stay most of the time at home, and have become isolated from the society at large.

8. High Rents

In Silicon Valley, the price of a house and rent are much higher than that of any other parts of the country. This problem constitutes a heavy burden on the working class in the Bay area and especially on the elderly Vietnamese refugees in California. Therefore, most of these elders could not afford the high rent and are forced to share a room in an apartment. It is not uncommon that three or sometimes four families share a three-bed-room apartment due to their low income.

The problem becomes serious when some old, sick, or handicapped refugees need a special bathroom, but they cannot afford it. Others want a quiet area to read or meditate, but children play, laugh, shout, and cry all the time. Most says that they do not have privacy because usually children and other people bother them. Living in such conditions, their mental health problems become more and more serious.

The only hope is that they will sooner obtain the Section 8---“the rent subsidized program,”--- through which the government pays two-thirds of the rent

and the renter pays only one-third. But according to the Housing Department, there are actually more than fifteen thousand of the low-income people on the waiting list, so that they usually have to wait from 8 to 10 years. Waiting for such a long period of time, many of the elderly refugees may die before getting help from the Housing Department!

CHAPTER VI

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Humanitarian Operation category of refugees suffered the greatest hardship during the long period of time of detention in reeducation camps. Due to the Communist furtive policy, those long-held in reeducation prisoners endured severe starvation, hard labor, and slow death, and their physical and mental health has been more or less handicapped when they arrived in the United States. They were forced to leave their country because of their political affiliation, religious beliefs, and previously close association with the former South Vietnamese government and American government.

Among the two million Vietnamese refugees scattered in thirty countries in the world, those who obtained shelter in the United States feel most favorable by chance as by all standards, since America has been seen as one of the most hospitable nation-state they could have chosen. As a matter of fact, this is the place where, as a group, they seem to make the most rapid headway in terms of economic self-sufficiency and social advancement. As Caplan, Whitemore, and Choy indicate, "Asian Americans have become the best educated Americans...we find an aspiring, upbeat people who have made some rather

remarkable economic and educational achievements.”³⁴

However, behind all the success stories, there is also a multitude of untold miseries and suffering. The task of surviving and starting a new life in a foreign country after being abruptly transplanted has not been easy or painless. It was unavoidable that the traumas of resettlement produced problems, which impinge upon the mental, social, and even physical well-being of the refugees.

In fact, Vietnamese refugees were facing a harrowing experience and a protracted ordeal, undergoing a very drastic life change in difficult circumstances. Here, in a new country, almost everything is new for them: from things as trivial as food or transportation, to subjects as complex language or social organization. All must be learned and mastered or at least made familiar with for the sake of self-preservation. New skills should be acquired but one does not quickly or easily discard old habits, beliefs and traditions that come from a lifetime experience. Changes in that domain therefore, are painful, laborious, and rarely complete, especially when they are felt as being imposed and forced upon from the outside, as it is the case for the refugees.

The fight for survival is hard enough for a newcomer against external odds: economic difficulties, social handicaps, cultural barriers, and more often

than one would like to remember, against prejudice and discrimination. Problems of isolation, role change, status upheaval, family dislocation, social disruption, as well as feelings of humiliation, fear, and frustration are so much the staple of any group of migrants.

They lost everything---wealth, power, social status, family members, and most importantly they suffered the shame of being defeated and the guilt of letting their country succumb under the Communist trample. When they arrived in the United States, most of them were frail, sick, physically and mentally exhausted, and too old to get a job in order to live a decent life. Ashamed to be dependent on welfare, many of them did not even contact relatives and friends and spent most of the time at home. They basically lost all hope for the future. Others did not speak English, seemed lost in a strange culture, lifestyle, and tradition, were afraid to go out, and became self-isolated. Still others were abused or neglected parents, lived alone, and became despaired; some became depressed and withdrawn. What should the Vietnamese communities, voluntary organizations, social agencies, medical centers, and other groups and agencies do in order to diminish such difficulties and problems and to help the elderly refugees better adjust to the American society?

Suggestions

The Vietnamese communities and voluntary organizations should play an active and central role in helping the refugees to establish a normal life in the host country. In fact, according to a study reported by the Bureau of Research and Training in the Pennsylvania Office of Mental Health in 1979, more than eighty percent of respondents indicated that developing community support system was the most important activity in relation to the Vietnamese refugees.³⁵

The Vietnamese refugees have to go through the ordeal with extra handicaps. The first one is to be members of an ethnic minority, which is not either very large or very influential. As a matter of fact, they miss the presence of a preexisting colony of migrant compatriots that could have helped them as a bridgehead for the resettlement in America like the Chinese or Japanese communities. Also they are Asians, and as such, endowed with distinctive physical features which make it impossible for them to mingle with the crowd and to achieve social invisibility and attain rapid and real assimilation in the same way Caucasians immigrants would.

To start with the obvious, the Vietnamese refugees are different: they are foreigners. Here, in the host country, almost everything is new for them: from

things as trivial as food or transportation, to subjects as complex as language or social organization. All must be learned, must be familiar with for the sake of self-preservation. More important, and also more elusive, are customs, ideas and attitudes of the people in this new land, one could not quite fathom or fully endorse, which, however, should be complied with and adjusted to. New skills can be acquired but one does not quickly or easily discard old habits, beliefs and traditions, which come from a lifetime experience. Changes in that domain are painful, laborious, and rarely complete.

With such a concentration of stresses: problems of survival, pressure to change, multiple losses, conflicts, ambivalence, many Vietnamese refugees hope that their communities may help them to overcome the problems and difficulties they have met during the process of adjustment to the American society. But unfortunately, the lack of the cohesion within the Vietnamese communities reduces their activities and cannot adequately meet the needs of the refugees. Therefore, the Vietnamese refugees strongly expect that the leaders of their communities should unite and coordinate their activities in order to help them more efficiently.

In addition, 76 percent of respondents suggest that training in cross

cultural and crisis intervention counseling is the important training needed for helping the Vietnamese refugees and immigrants. Additional subject areas are communication skills, identifying clients at risk, and overcoming client mistrust and fear. In fact, the Vietnamese communities and voluntary organizations have reported a wide range of training needs for their staff, especially the technique of crisis intervention. So long as these organizations do not have well trained staff, their activities are limited and less efficient in providing the necessary services.

Cultural Differences

With respect to cultural differences, elderly Vietnamese refugees found themselves thrust abruptly into a very different cultural structure when they came to America. The social relationship between youth of the opposite sex in Vietnam has been very guarded, and the Vietnamese have high moral standards. As a rule, with little or no dating between boys and girls and no physical contact permitted, there is very little opportunity for sexual promiscuity. Vietnamese parents choose the marriage partners for their children. This is unlike the customs of boy-girl relationship in America culture. They interact socially and with some restrictions, dating is usually permitted by age sixteen. Much should

be done in the way of helping both Vietnamese and Americans, especially elderly Vietnamese, to understand each other's culture. To do so, the Vietnamese communities and voluntary organizations should play an active role in educating their members the differences between the Vietnamese and American cultures and customs.

Vietnamese Traditional Health Beliefs

Moreover, Vietnamese, especially those coming from rural areas, frequently use folk treatments either concurrently or before seeking Western medical care. Those folk treatments are based on the concept of “yin yang” equilibrium. Drugs and medical herbs are also carefully classified according to their properties along a scale of hot and cold effects. From this concept, a number of techniques for the cure of illnesses have evolved:

*Cao gio, “coin rubbing” with hot balm oil that produces ecchymotic marks on the chest and back. This has, unfortunately been a source of many accusations of child abuse.

*Bat gio (“skin pinching”), a derivative of the above practice.

*Giac (“cup suctioning”), with or without prior scarification.

*Balm application (Tiger's balm, Mac Phsu or Nhi Thien Duong oil).

***Ingestion of herbal concoctions, an influence of traditional Chinese medicine.**

The Vietnamese communities and voluntary organizations should advise the refugees that such folk treatments may lead to court trials; and the school and police should know that the folk treatment is still popular among refugees coming from rural areas in order to avoid misunderstandings.

Living Accommodation

In terms of living accommodation, the communities and voluntary organizations should arrange for elders who reside far away from the Vietnamese centers and for the newcomers to move near by so that they do not have the feeling of being neglected or isolated. In order to afford the high rent in the Bay area, perhaps two families should share an apartment.

With regard to the handicapped and sick elderly refugees, there is a problem of living accommodation. They earnestly need a studio or apartment with a special bathroom for their use. The communities should collaborate with the Housing Department and other related agencies and present their cases. If a collaboration can be established, it would be a great relief for these elders.

Transportation

Concerning the transportation, communities and voluntary organizations should provide transportation for sick and handicapped elders who live alone because most of them stay at home all the time and become isolated. With our experience at San Jose State University, we have organized a group of voluntary students, who provide transportation for disabled people and sick elderly to the hospital, or to different social service agencies, to the Vietnamese community centers, and to churches and temples. For other elderly, the communities and voluntary organizations should show them how to use public transportation, how to read the bus or light rail schedule.

For the elders who live alone, the communities and voluntary organizations should organize home visits once a month to assess their needs. They also should contact them by phone once a week to greet them, and to ask if they need something, and to show them how to contact related organizations or agencies in case of emergency.

For the elders who live with their children, the communities and voluntary organizations should contact them in order to prevent them from being neglected or abused and to reconcile the conflict or misunderstanding between the elderly and family members in the earlier phase. Sometimes, with their adequate

intervention and their comfort, they can prevent the broken bonds between parent and children.

English as Second Language Program

So far, the Vietnamese Community Centers, the Vietnamese Senior Organization, the Asian Senior Assistance Program, the Saint James Senior Center and other voluntary agencies have organized English as Second Language (ESL) classes for Vietnamese refugees. Students consist of old and young refugees who have been admitted in the same class. The problem is that young students learn English much more quickly than the old. As a result, within a few weeks, the elders quit school because they can no longer keep up with the pace of the class. In addition, one respondent says that it hard for her to learn English because her pronunciation is so bad that when she speaks English in class, young students laugh; hence, she never went back to school. The communities and voluntary agencies should pay attention to these inconveniences and to organize separate English classes for elders.

Another problem in the ESL classes concerns the teachers. Many of them are young high school students. Most of them were born and educated in the United States, speak English fluently, and have been impregnated with the

American culture; so they do not show respect for the elders. As a result, many older students don't want to learn English with young teachers. Therefore, the community and voluntary agencies should pay more attention to these inconveniences in order to teach English to the elders efficiently.

Besides, the elders, especially those being held in reeducation camps for a long period of time, usually lost some of their memory and cannot remember much what they have learned in class. Because English is very important for the refugees to better adjust to the American society, the communities and voluntary organizations should consider the need for more adequate and intensive English as Second Language (ESL) programs. In short, more intensive, personally tailored, vocational training programs should be a long-term solution to the adjustment problems of the refugees.

In addition, other needs have been revealed such as socialization, cross cultural education, early identification of Vietnamese elders at risk for depression, early intervention to alleviate the causes of depression, senior companion, health screening, legal assistance, and exercise classes. To meet these needs, the Vietnamese communities and voluntary organizations should have well trained staff, who are culturally sensitive and linguistically able, to

help the elderly refugees to better adjust to the American society.

Mental Health Problems

Concerning mental health problems, the Bureau of Research and Training in the Pennsylvania Office of Mental Health reports that the stress of uprooting and cultural adjustment has led to emotional difficulties among the refugees. The study indicates that the Voluntary Agencies identify over one-half (56%) of the refugees with mental health problems, whereas the public mental health system sees only 4% of the identified clients.³⁶ The differences of the data collected by Voluntary Agencies and Community Mental Health Centers can be explained by the cultural reluctance among refugees to seek help which results in underrating the problems. Their reluctance is probably due to an overwhelming concern that they may be viewed as a problem to the community, thereby becoming undesirables. The communities and voluntary organizations should make an effort to create an atmosphere of interaction conducive and to persuade refugees to use the mental health services.

The report also shows that the Vietnamese appear to have a broader range of problems such as higher level of anxiety than other groups, distress, and depression. Some voluntary agencies speculate that those refugees who have

arrived recently also may not experience emotional distress until sometime late, but others feel that recent experiences undergone by refugees during and after their departure from their homeland would exacerbate the problems. The confusion and trauma of departure from their homeland coupled with the effects of grief and loss experienced by some refugees, may herald a sharp increase in mental health problems among these populations in the near future. Therefore, the Community Mental Health Centers should train their staff in specific therapeutic techniques to be used with the Vietnamese refugees, and train more Vietnamese to be psychiatric social workers including techniques of crisis intervention.

The Vietnamese communities and voluntary organizations report a wide range of training needs for their staff. Beginning with the recognition of symptoms and interview methodology, a number of agencies feel a need to receive training in how to refer clients in need of mental health services. Cross cultural information and counseling, as a general category, has been frequently mentioned as a training need. The community and voluntary agencies staff should be trained to deal with the Vietnamese feelings of mistrust and fear, the dynamics of trauma, and what constitutes personality changes in an Vietnamese

client; how and when to set limits with a client, and how to empathize with a client also have been listed as training needs.

A majority of the Community Mental Health Centers indicated that they did not serve sufficient number of Vietnamese refugees within their catchment area to warrant an expansion of their program. However, if this is to change in the future, the Community Mental Health Centers feel that there would be a need for an increased outreach and community education effort, as well as the need to hire professional and paraprofessional mental health staff.

CONCLUSION

An Agreement, commonly called "Humanitarian Operation," signed on July 30, 1989 allowed more than one hundred thousand political prisoners and their families from Vietnam to settle in the United States. Essentially, they are refugees, and by definition, involuntary migrants. They were forced to flee the country; they see themselves as exiles and uprooted, chased off the land they feel they still belong at heart. For them, to leave is to lose everything; hence, the regrets and nostalgia make them constantly look back to the past and their homeland where they have left their soul.

Here, in the host country, almost everything is new for them: from things as trivial as food or transportation, to subjects as complex as language or social organization. It is unavoidable that the traumas of resettlement produced problems, which impinge upon the mental, social, and even physical well-being of the refugees. Problems of isolation, role change, status upheaval, family dislocation, social disruption, as well as feelings of humiliation, fear, and anger are so much the staple of this group of refugees.

Unlike the migrants who respond to the prospects of a better life and try to make it good on their own terms, many Vietnamese elderly refugees have not planned for a future in a new country. Although they view themselves as refugees, seeking asylum in the United States, they are usually awaiting for the time and moment to come back to Vietnam, where they still have a strong bond with their ancestors, relatives, and friends. Actually, they do not want to think that they are here to stay, and they resent any move which implies that they are settling for good, or that they may never return “home,” where they have left their soul.

Living in the host country, with a concentration of stresses: problems of survival, pressure to change, multiple losses, conflicts, ambivalence...one may

have guessed that casualties are unavoidable and numerous. But what eats them up, makes them heave and sigh, and also stands in their way to living a normal, productive existence, is too often ignored and almost completely hidden from public view. The elderly refugees are in pain, distraught, and unhappy, and yet they rarely complain or open up on these subjects, except maybe to close friends and relatives. To make the matters worse, a mental health professional most probably has no direct access to such anguish, either to assess or to help. And so they continue with their daily life, giving occasional clues about their plights only to an attentive observer, until a final showdown or the ultimate breakdown, stoic, not complaining, not asking for any help and least of all, from any mental health worker.

The elderly Vietnamese refugees have been defeated by circumstances beyond their control, and now they flee the country and become refugees. But often, even after they have been fed, clothed, and sheltered, there is something else that nobody could really help: the emptiness, loneliness, and helplessness. This has never been easy to express, even less easy to tackle with, as they are not seen as “real,” or tangible problems. They are also too personal, too intimate matters to share except perhaps with few individuals they can trust: family

members and trusted friends.

And indeed, realism, resignation, or stoicism notwithstanding, no one could really face such an amount of miseries and not want to seek relief one way or another. Denial, which is used quite extensively as a defensive mechanism, works effectively only to a certain extent and at some point, the reality of the pain and the distress can no longer be ignored. Therefore, the Vietnamese communities, voluntary organizations, social service agencies, mental health clinics, and related institutions should give adequate attention and assistance to these unfortunate and pitiable elderly refugees in order to help them better adjust to the American society.

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Appendix

The Human Subjects-Institutional Review Board Approval Letter.

Consent Form (Vietnamese and English versions)

Cover Letter (Vietnamese and English versions)

Questionnaire (Vietnamese and English versions)

Interview Questions (Vietnamese and English versions)

San José State
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TO: Thanh Tran
5267 Garrison Circle
San Jose, CA 95123

FROM: Nabil Ibrahim,
Acting AVP, Graduate Studies & Research

DATE: **March 25, 1999**

The Human Subjects-Institutional Review Board has approved your request to use human subjects in the study entitled:

"The Elderly Vietnamese Refugees Experience in America"

This approval is contingent upon the subjects participating in your research project being appropriately protected from risk. This includes the protection of the anonymity of the subjects' identity when they participate in your research project, and with regard to any and all data that may be collected from the subjects. The Board's approval includes continued monitoring of your research by the Board to assure that the subjects are being adequately and properly protected from such risks. If at any time a subject becomes injured or complains of injury, you must notify Nabil Ibrahim, Ph.D., immediately. Injury includes but is not limited to bodily harm, psychological trauma and release of potentially damaging personal information.

Please also be advised that all subjects need to be fully informed and aware that their participation in your research project is voluntary, and that he or she may withdraw from the project at any time. Further, a subject's participation, refusal to participate, or withdrawal will not affect any services the subject is receiving or will receive at the institution in which the research is being conducted.

**If you have any questions, please contact me at
(408) 924-2480.**

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(408) 924-2480.

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Social Science Program
Women's Studies Program

Ngày 18 tháng 11 năm 1998

Kính thưa quý vị Niên Trưởng,

Tôi là Trần Đắc Thành, sinh viên ban Cao Học trường San Jose State University, có dự án nghiên cứu về sinh hoạt của quý vị cao niên người Việt hiện đang sinh sống trên đất Mỹ.

Tôi thiết nghĩ, đối với một số vị đã từng tiếp xúc với người Tây Phương, quen thuộc với nền văn hóa của họ, thì sự hội nhập vào xã hội Mỹ của quý vị ấy có phần dễ dàng và thuận lợi.

Trái lại, đối với một số vị ít tiếp xúc với phong tục tập quán của người Tây Phương và một số vị thuộc diện "H.O", sau nhiều năm bị đi học tập cải tạo, sức khỏe yếu kém, tinh thần sa sút, có lẽ việc hội nhập vào xã hội Mỹ gặp nhiều khó khăn hơn.

Để giúp tôi có những tài liệu cụ thể, xin quý vị Niên Trưởng vui lòng trả lời những câu hỏi đính kèm theo bức thư này. Sự giúp đỡ quý báu của quý vị là một đóng góp quan trọng vào việc hoàn thành luận án của chúng tôi.

Xin chân thành cảm tạ quý vị và kính chúc quý vị được an khang, trường thọ.

Kính,

Trần Đắc Thành

TRẦN ĐẮC THÀNH

The California State University:
Chancellor's Office
Bakersfield Chico Dominguez Hills
Fresno Fullerton Hayward Humboldt
Long Beach Los Angeles Maritime Academy
Monterey Bay Northridge Pomona
Sacramento San Bernardino San Diego
San Francisco San Jose San Luis Obispo
San Marcos Sonoma Stanislaus

CONSENT FORM

You are invited to participate in a study on the elderly Vietnamese refugees (65 years old and over) living in the United States. I hope to learn the problems and difficulties that the elders have met during the process of adjustment to the American society. You are selected as a possible participant in the study because you are Vietnamese in this situation. If you agree to participate, I will send you a questionnaire. And later, I will make an appointment with you and will interview you about this topic.

There are no risks for any participant in this study. Any information being obtained in connection with this research that can be identified with you will remain confidential. The questionnaire will not contain your address, phone number, and Social Security number. You can use any anonymous name.

Your decision whether or not to participate in the interview will not prejudice your future relation with the College of Social Sciences (SJSU).

If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and to discontinue participation at any time without prejudice. If you have any questions, I expect you ask me, Thanh Tran, the responsible investigator, phone # (408) 281-3158. If you have any questions later, Dr. Nabil Ibrahim, phone # (408) 924-2480 will be glad to answer them.

For questions or complaints about the research's subject rights or research-related injury, please contact with Dr. Nabil Ibrahim, Acting Associate Vice President for Graduate Studies and Research, at (408) 924-2480.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep

YOU ARE MAKING A DECISION WHETHER OR NOT TO PARTICIPATE.

HAVING READ THE INFORMATION PROVIDED ABOVE AND HAVING SIGNED THIS
CONSENT FORM, YOU HAVE DECIDED TO PARTICIPATE IN THE INTERVIEW.

Date _____

Signature _____

Signature of Investigator _____

MẪU CHẤP THUẬN

Ông/Bà được mời tham dự một cuộc khảo sát về kinh nghiệm của những vị cao niên từ 65 tuổi trở lên hiện đang sống tại Mỹ. Chúng tôi hi vọng tìm hiểu được những khó khăn và trở ngại mà những vị cao niên thường gặp trong tiến trình hòa nhập vào xã hội Mỹ. Nếu Ông/Bà đồng ý tham dự, chúng tôi sẽ gửi đến một bản câu hỏi và sau đó chúng tôi sẽ liên lạc với Ông/Bà để xin hẹn ngày giờ đến làm cuộc phỏng vấn liên quan đến đề tài này.

Bất cứ tài liệu nào liên quan đến Ông/Bà, địa chỉ, ý kiến, v.v., đều được giữ kín. Những câu hỏi sẽ không ghi tên địa chỉ và số An Sinh Xã Hội.... của người được phỏng vấn. Ông/Bà có thể dùng bất cứ tên giả nào.

Sự quyết định tham dự hay không vào cuộc khảo sát và phỏng vấn sẽ không khiến Ông/Bà gặp khó khăn nào sau này khi Ông/Bà có việc liên hệ với Phân Khoa Xã Hội Học (College of Social Sciences) thuộc Viện Đại Học San Jose State University.

Nếu Ông/Bà quyết định tham dự thì Ông/Bà sẽ được tự do bỏ cuộc bất cứ lúc nào mà Ông/Bà muốn mà không gặp một sự khó khăn nào.

Nếu Ông/Bà có câu hỏi nào, chúng tôi hi vọng Ông/Bà sẽ hỏi chúng tôi tên là Thành Trần, người thực hiện cuộc khảo sát, D.T. # (408) 281-3158. Nếu sau này Ông/Bà cần hỏi thêm câu nào nữa thì Dr. Nabil Ibrahim, điện thoại số (408) 924-2480 sẽ sẵn sàng trả lời Ông/Bà.

Đối với những câu hỏi hoặc khiếu nại liên quan đến bản quyền của cuộc khảo sát, hoặc những tổn thương liên hệ đến cuộc khảo sát, xin Ông/Bà liên lạc với Dr. Nabil Ibrahim, Acting Associate Vice President for Graduate Studies and Research, D.T. # (408) 924-2480.

Ông/Bà sẽ nhận được bản sao của mẫu này để làm tài liệu

ÔNG/BÀ ĐANG QUYẾT ĐỊNH THAM DỰ HAY KHÔNG VÀO CUỘC KHẢO SÁT NÀY.

ĐÃ ĐỌC BẢN VĂN TRÊN VÀ ĐÃ KÝ TÊN VÀO MẪU CHẤP THUẬN NÀY, ÔNG/BÀ XÁC NHẬN RẰNG ÔNG/BÀ ĐÃ BẰNG LÒNG THAM DỰ VÀO CUỘC PHỎNG VẤN.

Ngày _____

Ký tên _____

Người khảo sát ký tên _____

Trần Thành, D.T. số (408) 281-3158

San José State
UNIVERSITY

**College of Social Sciences
Social Science Department**

One Washington Square
San Jose, CA 95192-0121
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Asian American Studies
Program
Cultural Pluralism Program
Social Science Program
Women's Studies Program

Ngày 18 tháng 11 năm 1998

Kính thưa quý vị Niên Trưởng,

Tôi là Trần Đắc Thành, sinh viên ban Cao Học trường San Jose State University và có dự án nghiên cứu về sinh hoạt của quý vị cao niên người Việt hiện đang sinh sống trên đất Mỹ.

Tôi thiết nghĩ, đối với một số vị đã từng tiếp xúc với người Tây Phương, quen thuộc với nền văn hóa của họ, thì sự hội nhập vào xã hội Mỹ của quý vị ấy có phần dễ dàng và thuận lợi.

Trái lại, đối với một số vị ít tiếp xúc với phong tục tập quán của người Tây Phương và một số vị thuộc diện "H.O", sau nhiều năm bị đi học tập cải tạo, sức khỏe yếu kém, tinh thần sa sút, có lẽ việc hội nhập vào xã hội Mỹ gặp nhiều khó khăn hơn.

Để giúp tôi có những tài liệu cụ thể, xin quý vị Niên Trưởng vui lòng trả lời những câu hỏi đính kèm theo bức thư này. Sự giúp đỡ quý báu của quý vị là một đóng góp quan trọng vào việc hoàn thành luận án của chúng tôi.

Xin chân thành cảm tạ quý vị và kính chúc quý vị được an khang, trường thọ.

Kính,

Thanh D. Tran

TRẦN ĐẮC THÀNH

The California State University:
Chancellor's Office
Bakersfield, Chico, Dominguez Hills,
Fresno, Fullerton, Hayward, Humboldt,
Long Beach, Los Angeles, Marquette Academy,
Monterey Bay, Northridge, Pomona,
Sacramento, San Bernardino, San Diego,
San Francisco, San José, San Luis Obispo,
San Marcos, Sonoma, Stanislaus

COVER LETTER

Dear Senior Citizens,

I am Tran, Thanh, a graduate student at the San Jose State University. I have been conducting a research on the elderly Vietnamese refugees in America.

I think it is relatively easy for the elderly Vietnamese refugees who have been familiar with the Western culture and lifestyle to integrate into the American mainstream.

On the contrary, the elders who do not know the Western culture and do not speak English may encounter difficulties and problems during the process of adjustment to the host society.

In order to help me to collect concrete data, please answer the questions listed in the attached questionnaire. Your help contributes a great deal to the completion of my Master's thesis.

Thank you very much, and I wish you good health and longevity.

Sincerely Yours, -

Tran Thanh

**San José State
UNIVERSITY**

*College of Social Sciences - Department of Social Science
Asian American Studies, Cultural Pluralism, Social Science Program, Women's Studies Program
One Washington Square - San Jose, California 95192-0121 - 408-924-3740 - FAX 408-924-5753*

Xin quý vị Niên Trưởng vui lòng trả lời những câu hỏi sau đây :

- 1.- Họ và Tên : _____
- 2.- Năm sinh : _____. Giới tính : Nam /_/ Nữ /_/
- 3.- Trình độ học vấn : Trung học /_/ Đại học /_/ Trên Đại học /_/
- 4.- Cấp bậc hoặc ngạch trật trước 1975 : _____
- 5.- Chức vụ cao nhất đã giữ trước 1975 : _____
- 6.- Thời gian học tập cải tạo : _____
- 7.- Năm đến nước Mỹ : _____
- 8.- Đến Mỹ cùng với : Vợ/Chồng /_/ Con /_/ Một mình /_/
- 9.- Hiện cư ngụ với : Vợ/Chồng /_/ Con /_/ Một mình /_/
- 10.- Lợi tức thu nhập hàng tháng : _____
- 11.- Nguồn gốc lợi tức : Lương bổng : /_/ Hưu bổng /_/
Lợi tức kinh doanh /_/ Trợ cấp xã hội (SSI, GA) /_/
- 12.- Tiền thuê nhà hàng tháng : _____
(Hoặc tiền hàng tháng trả cho ngân hàng, nếu là chủ nhà) _____
- 13.- Tham gia các sinh hoạt của Cộng Đồng hoặc Hội Đoàn trong 6 tháng qua :
Nhiều lần /_/ Một vài lần /_/ Không có tham gia /_/
- 14.- Đi chùa chiền, nhà thờ hoặc cơ sở tôn giáo trong 6 tháng qua :
Nhiều lần /_/ Một vài lần /_/ Không có tham gia /_/
- 15.- Những thuận lợi trong việc hội nhập vào xã hội Mỹ : (*)

- 16.- Những khó khăn trở ngại trong việc hội nhập vào xã hội Mỹ : (*)

- 17.- Những đề nghị nhằm giúp giảm bớt những khó khăn : (*)

(*) Nếu không đủ chỗ, xin quý vị viết tiếp ở trang sau.

QUESTIONNAIRE

Please answer the following questions:

1. Name (can use any anonymous name)
2. Date of birth Gender: Male () Female ()
3. Education High school () College () Beyond college ()
4. Occupation before 1975
5. The highest position held before 1975
6. The length of detention in re-education camps
7. Date of arrival in the United States
8. Coming to the US with spouse () with children () or alone ()
9. Living with spouse () with children () or living alone ()
10. Monthly incomes
11. Sources of incomes Salary () Retiring pension () Business revenue () Welfare ()
12. Monthly Rent
13. Participation in the Vietnamese Communities' or political organizations' activities in the past six months Some times () Many times () No participation ()
14. Church attendance in the past six months Some times () Many times () No attendance ()
15. Convenience met during the process of integration into the American mainstream
16. Difficulties and problems met during the process of adjustment to host society
17. Suggestions in order to diminish such difficulties