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PROBLEMS OF THE INDOCHINESE REFUGEES IN THAILAND

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PROBLEMS OF THE INDOCHINESE REFUGEES IN THAILAND

by

NATHANART BOONYAPRATUANG

A THESIS SUBMITTED
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

MASTER OF ARTS

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Abstract

Problems of the Indochinese Refugees in Thailand

Increasingly, the problem of refugeeism has manifested itself throughout the world. Although there are several kinds of refugees (economic, religious, ethnic, etc...), this thesis concerns war refugees. A number of countries became involved in refugee matters either as first countries of asylum or as third countries of resettlement. Thailand was no exception. The three Indochinese wars brought massive movements of refugees into Thailand. Assistance from involving foreign governments and international organizations seems insufficient in alleviating refugee burdens. Thousands of Vietnamese refugees are left in Thailand since 1945 and refugee problems have remained unsolved until the present time. In this light, this thesis postulates that whenever Indochina is in crises, the waves of refugees will be directed toward Thailand, so long as the latter remains a non-Communist nation.
Acknowledgments

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DEDICATED TO MY PARENTS
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INTRODUCTION

I. General Background

It has been a well-known phenomenon since antiquity that a state of homelessness exists through the movements of displaced persons who flee persecution or injustice imposed on them and seek refuge in another area where lie their hopes for a better life. Thus, not a phenomenon of the Twentieth Century alone, the state of refugeeism has existed throughout the history of mankind and in every part of the world, and has manifested itself in various forms with varying causes and objectives. There are several kinds of refugees and, depending on how one wants to view the matter, refugees can be differentiated between domestic and international movements of displaced persons. The so-called domestic refugees are, for instance, those confronted with natural disasters such as famine, hurricane, flooding, etc... and may have to evacuate and seek refuge in another part of the country. From this standpoint, the same notion of domestic refugee could be assigned to those escaping from civil war, or those abandoning their hometown for job opportunities elsewhere in the country. This kind of refugee usually enjoys full rights of citizenship and are, in general, legally entitled to government support.

On the other hand, the international refugees find themselves in a more serious situation both when leaving their country of habitual residence and when entering either the country of first asylum or the country of permanent resettlement. Furthermore, problems of adaptation and social acceptance await for them in their new homeland. Generally
speaking, these international movements encompass four basic types of displaced persons: religious, ethnic, economic, and political refugees. Religious refugees are those who are strongly devoted to their particular religion, doctrine, or ideology, and have the tendency to conduct activities in order to attract followers and expand their influence, the objectives of which are not always purely religious. The threat of persecution exists when their activities enter into conflict with major religious bodies of the country in which they operate, or when their activities are perceived by the government as a threat to national security interests. On the other hand, the second type of refugees which includes both linguistic and ethnic differences faces either racial discrimination which makes their living intolerable, or is persecuted on racial bases, or otherwise seeks acceptance where they perceive they will be better treated. Somewhat different in their motives, the economic refugees are not persecuted in the same manner or to the same extent as other categories of refugees. On the contrary, they become dissatisfied with their standard of living, desire to improve their lives, perceive economic opportunities elsewhere, and often profit by the favorable situation for evacuation, disguising their underlying motives, and taking up, for example, the roles of war refugees. However, this conceptual framework does not reject the notion that economic refugees can also be persecuted on political bases. In this light, the change of political regime from a democratic system to that of Communist does indeed hurt private businesses — as well as other sectors such as the religious, personal properties, etc. It becomes, then, extremely difficult to make a clearcut distinction
between economic and political refugees. The question is to what extent political persecution can be differentiated between directly affecting the individuals as a group of citizenry regardless of what they do, and affecting the business as a part of political system without the intention of harming individuals involved. This issue leads to the last major type, which concerns political refugees. This category encompasses those persecuted by various forms of political action, and may involve military personnel, revolutionists, war victims, politicians, and the like. These people are usually against the mainstream of political system of the country where their existence is considered dangerous to the stability of the government. At best, they are allowed to leave the country and remain in exile; at worst, they must escape from the country at any cost and seek political asylum in another nation where their lives will not be threatened. It is within this last category that emerges the core concept of political refugees to be dealt with in this thesis. More specifically, the scope is limited to the term "refugee" defined as "victim of war who flees political persecution and seeks refuge in another country". In other words, this definition is similar to the one officially postulated in the later part of Article I of the OAU Refugee Convention amended in 1969 from the original text of 1951:

"... The term 'refugees' shall also apply to every person who, owing to external aggression, occupation, foreign domination or events seriously disturbing public order in either part or the whole of his country of origin or nationality, is compelled to leave his place of
habitual residence to seek refuge in another place outside his country of origin or nationality". (1)

Thus defined, the existence of war victim refugees raises three basic issues: the cause, the attractiveness, and the problem. The cause of war refugeeism takes root in the causes of war itself. War refugees, therefore, are rather one of the many unfortunate consequences or a by-product of war. It could be argued that it is a condition brought into being by causes over which they have no control. Thus conceived, the cause of the refugee lies outside its sphere, and to fully understand the causation, the study of war is deemed necessary. However, such study is beyond the scope of this thesis, and it suffice to conclude here that in spite of the existence of many theories concerning the causes of war, and the devotion of human efforts both from governmental officials and academic researchers, the breaking out of war has proved inevitable. So long as war remains a recurring phenomenon, the world will face the endless proliferation of refugees and the problem thereafter.

On the other hand, this concept of refugeeism defined as an involuntary condition imposed on the victims of war posits a different frame of reference for the second issue concerning "attractiveness". Why do some war victims want to seek refuge in another country while others choose to remain or go back to their country of nationality when circumstances allow? The temporary refugees do not pose as many problems as those who desire to be permanently resettled outside their
country. It could be argued that when the fear or the actual act of persecution and opportunity meet, war victims become then attracted to the status of refugee in order to flee from their present conditions. The issue of attractiveness constitutes a variety of factors: in the case of refugees from Third World nations, the transition from a technologically obsolete and traditional society to a modern one appears to offer many opportunities for a better life. It should be noted that if war refugees are indeed in search of a peaceful place to live, then there should be no difference between their choices of country of permanent resettlement. On the contrary, it is obvious that the majority of them tend to opt for an advanced Western society such as the United States, France, Switzerland, Australia, Canada, etc... Would their choices remain the same and their struggle as hard if the destination is shifted to peaceful African nations or isolated islands? It is only when these Western nations impose quotas on the number of refugees to be accepted and when it is impossible or undesirable to go back that these unfortunate refugees will agree to go to a less attractive place. From the psychological viewpoint, the peoples of the Third World nations consider being able to live in Western societies an honor, a cause for prestige, since most of the people who can go overseas are the well-to-do. Moreover, once the new citizenship is acquired, they can benefit from governmental support and job opportunities. As refugees, therefore, their decisions seem to be rationalized by humanitarian reasons and eased by international support.
Finally, the refugee movements inherently entail several problems. It could be argued that these problems involve almost all aspects of social life, ranging from basic needs of human being to social integration. Certainly, the extent and the degree of severity of problems vary with the national characteristics and background of the country of refuge. However, whereas problems are imposed on the country of first asylum whether or not it wants or is ready to handle the situation, the country of permanent resettlement finds itself in a better condition. This latter may agree to accept refugees either on its own will or by playing politics: Canada, for example, has tended to welcome refugees for permanent resettlement since 1945; on the other hand, refugees may be admitted to a third country because of the international or United Nations pressures. Further, it is more likely to have sufficient material support to attack problems, and seems ready to confront with better alternatives than could the first country of asylum in most cases. By the same token, from both the economic and political standpoint, its burdens appear less heavy; but from the social standpoint, problems tend to be of a long term nature and assimilation doubtful, especially in cases where physical traits remind ethnic differences, i.e., Italians or Jews are more easily absorbed than Japanese or Chinese living in the United States.

In the case of Indochinese refugees, Thailand --as both country of first asylum and of permanent resettlement-- confronted these problems as early as 1926. According to the Thai government, displaced persons from Vietnam have been classified as political, war, or economic
refugees. In most cases, they illegally penetrated the Thai border on political bases: fleeing from French massacre, Communist threat, etc... Many of them originally intended to go back to their homeland when the situation would be stabilized. However, due to difficulties in political arrangement, only some were repatriated or sent to another country of permanent resettlement. The rest have remained in Thailand ever since. Here again, as it has been in many cases, the difficulty in making a clear distinction between political and economic refugees emerged. However, the Thai government labelled some groups of illegal immigrants as economic refugees, especially when their intentions were veiled by seeking illegal ways to get Thai citizenship in order to be free of restrictions imposed on them under the refugee policy and to control the economy of the areas in which they lived. It should be noted here that the acquisition of citizenship does not necessary lead to assimilation nor loyalty to the new homeland. Rather, personal gain is considered as a material benefit unrelated to the acknowledgement of or gratitude toward the Thai government while belief and ideology are faithfully kept toward the Communist regime. Thus, the fear of Communist infiltration and national security interest have been a major concern of the Thai government. Moreover, since the fall of Indochina in 1975 and the subsequent Communist threat of 1979 in Kampuchea which drove huge waves of refugees into Thailand, the concern over the issue of national security has been even more accentuated and the threat more clearly perceived. The nation is no longer faced with subversive activities of small network groups, but with neighbouring countries under opposing political systems. This does not mean that nations with
opposing political regimes cannot coexist side by side. They can. But when a nation is ruled by Communist government, it tends to be supported by either one of the major Communist powers, i.e., the Soviet Union or China --the Thai government's perception has been that both Russia and China have launched the politics of expansionism or imperialism, characterizing their ideological principles and foreign policy. Thus Thailand, under a non-Communist political system, has to deal with neighbouring Communist countries backed by Russian support. In this light, the refugee issue offers a dangerous scenario: a threatening external environment, Communist infiltration and clandestine activities, economic burdens, and social problems. A considerable amount of resources that would normally be devoted to the development and defense of the nation has to be utilized in handling this matter.

II. Why Indochina?

In choosing the topic for my thesis, I have been inspired by several reasons. First of all, as a citizen of Thailand who wishes to serve her country, I feel strongly concerning situations at home and the future of my country. What has become of Indochina and its peoples has been a dreadful nightmare and I hope Thailand will never have to undergo such a fatal experience. In spite of my sincere sympathy for these unfortunate people --many of whom I once knew and were my schoolmates-- I am of the opinion that the burden imposed on my country is unfair and too large for a small nation to handle since
international aid and cooperation remain insufficient for such a massive task. Moreover, Thailand was not the cause of Indochinese war and consequently should not have to take a major share of the burden.

In the second place, following my father who was successively appointed head of diplomatic missions to Laos, Vietnam, then Cambodia by the Thai government, I spent more than eight years in Indochina with my family. I lived there in times of war and crisis... and witnessed the fall of Phnom-Penh in 1975. I have had genuine interests in these peoples, their cultures, and their countries, now destroyed by war. Many similarities with the Thai culture could be depicted, yet the roots that are responsible for economic and technological difference have invited my curiosity. I have known people who were later killed, others who had fled their countries before Communist take-over, and still others became refugees in concentration camps in Thailand. Yet there have also been those whose existence remains unconfirmed. Besides this personal experience, my interest in refugee problem has been inspired by my father, H.E. Asa Boonyapruatang, who was Deputy Director of the International Organization of the Thai Foreign Ministry from 1976 to 1978. In his efforts to help alleviate the refugee problem in Thailand, he travelled to several countries as a member of the Thai government delegation in order to negotiate refugee resettlement and obtain financial aid.

III. Thesis Proposal
Finally, all these factors have generated in me a greater awareness of the mounting scope of refugee problem facing not only Thailand, but the world as a whole. The problem will continue to be created so long as there will be wars; the need to rescue and alleviate refugees will be more obvious and an increasing awareness of human suffering will lead to greater support of humanitarian reasons by foreign governments. Statelessness has become a human problem that grabs the attention of more and more foreign governments and international organizations. By the same token, increasing efforts have been put in the attempt to find a permanent solution to the refugee problem. But it seems that no universal theory has yet been derived, and because of the contextual complexity of refugee movements, problems tend to be solved on a case-by-case basis. It is obvious that refugee policy has to be changed over time to serve specific purposes in different contexts in a more efficient way. But eventually, inadequacies often occur either due to the implementation of an unsuitable system, the adoption of a policy previously used with success in another country or context, or the interplay of external variables. On the other hand, controversies are often raised over the issues of "fair treatment", righteousness, or uniformity of refugee policy. What are, then, the laws that can govern all nations? To what extent can the United Nations exercise its authority upon various national governments in their conduct towards the refugee problem? These questions may appear naive, but they do suggest the idea of how complex the refugee issue is, and how uncontrollable its constituents might be. Thus, limited by the inherent complexity of the problem
itself, this thesis is not in search for a permanent solution to the
refugee problem. It does, however, propose a model that could help
both the Thai government and its Indochinese refugees, by taking into
consideration Thailand's past experiences concerning refugee matters,
the culture and nature of society, public opinion, economic and
material feasibility, military and political constraints, the roles of
external powers, as well as the treatment of refugees practiced by
different nations. In other words, it is the view of this thesis that
measures so far taken by countries of first asylum, by involving
foreign governments, and by international organizations, can not solve
or alleviate problems to the extent that they have been designed for.
It is also believed that there exist ways to improve the situation as
it now is.

IV. Thesis Overview

The first chapter acquaints the reader with different definitions
of the term "refugee", then looks into some specific case studies, with
an emphasis on first countries of asylum. Furthermore, it studies the
recent Indochinese case in terms of problems imposed on Thailand, and
raises the issue of why particular countries are chosen as first
asylum. The second chapter pictures the history of the Vietnamese
refugees in Thailand, and relates earlier experiences to the current
situation created by the fall of Indochina in 1975. It ends with a
classification of refugee status. The following chapter deals with the
Thai refugee policy and its evolution through time. In addition, it
attempts to explain various factors behind policy outcomes. Chapter Four describes the Thai people's attitudes towards the Indochinese states and the subsequent effects on refugees. Finally, the last chapter offers a comparison between Thailand's two experiences, evaluates the effectiveness of refugee policy, and suggests an alternative.
Introduction: Footnotes

Chapter I

The Refugee

Increasingly, the world after World War II has been facing with the plight of refugees and refugee problems. Massive movements of refugees are found in the cases of the division of Europe that caused several hundred thousand people to abandon their habitual residences in Poland and East Germany and to move westward; the foundation of Israel that created the Arab refugee camps; the political crises in China, Korea, India, Tibet, Vietnam, Cuba, and Congo, among many instances, produced endless flows of displaced persons. While the existence of a considerable number of refugees is important in their correlation with political, economic, social, and sometimes ethnic or demographic changes, the refugee problem has received relatively little attention (1) by social scientists when compared to other political issues. Furthermore, it could be argued that refugeeism is still on the increase throughout the world, especially in underdeveloped or developing nations. To a certain degree, many tensions emerge only when they explode into open conflict and the potential for mass transfers of populations tend to be minimized. Partly for this reason, foreign governments of potential first countries of asylum and third countries often find themselves unprepared to confront refugee situations. On the other hand, it could also be said that the state of preparedness may motivate a larger influx of refugees, encompassing both the truly persecuted and the seekers of a betterment. Who, then, is defined as "refugee"? This question may appear simple, yet it is important because it can serve as a basis for characterizing and classifying refugees. This, in turn, will allow the more appropriate
means to be devised in order to remedy each different situation. For example, war refugees often seek only temporary refuge while awaiting the situation at home to stabilize and become safe enough to return; on the other hand, another kind of political refugees involves those who take either temporary or permanent asylum depending on how long their hostile political figures can stay in power, or how much support they can secure in order to resist against the enemy. By contrast, economic refugees usually aim at the granting of a permanent resettlement in the pursuit of their economic objectives. But sometimes the term "refugee" is used indiscriminately to designate the uprooted mass.

I. Definition

There are a number of definitions that are assigned to the term "refugee". In this light, "refugee" may be defined as:

Refugees are...those who seek shelter or protection from danger or disease (2).

Refugees are those who cross one of these borders to seek safety and asylum in another region (3).

A refugee is a person who has left his country of nationality... because of a "well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, or political opinion" (4).

The list of refugee definitions can go on and on depending on who defines it: the government, the scholar, etc..., and on the purpose for which the definition will be used. The definition is crucial in
its power to determine which individuals are eligible for international protection and which are denied such rights. But in general, the state of refugeeism depicts four criteria: persecution, fear, flight, and asylum. It should also be noted that besides the term "refugee", other terms are also used to designate the uprooted people and a brief distinction between these terms and their definition seem to be in order. The term "displaced person" is applied to those who have been removed from their habitual residence by official or para-official action. On the other hand, "illegal immigrants" are defined as those who simply migrate to another country to profit from economic opportunities and claim eligibility to international protection and benefit. They are usually not qualified for refugee status if it can be proved that their motives are purely economic, which is often impossible to discern.

Moreover, it is practically impossible to distinguish meaningfully between "refugee" and "displaced person" since many of those who fled of their own free will when it was still possible to flee, have also avoid official expulsion. Thus, the status of the Chinese residents expelled from Vietnam in 1978 and 1979 became identical with that of those who left earlier. The difference merely lies in the timing. People classified under these two categories are usually granted eligibility.

However, the general definition can be broken down into more specific definitions for different types of refugees. As already mentioned in the Introduction, the refugee population can be classified according to the cause of seeking asylum. From this standpoint, a
typology postulates four basic categories that can be distinguished between religious, ethnic, economic, and political refugees. Both the religious and ethnic refugees may be defined as:

"...(T)hose people who, as a result of a new government or new policies find themselves a threatened minority in a hostile environment merely of some characteristic of their identity... Because of this dissonance, they leave their environment for safer shores" (5).

The ethnic cause of refugeeism is illustrated in the extermination of six million Jews by Hitler before and during World War II (6) and the massive expulsion of Chinese residents throughout Vietnam in 1977 (7). The cases of the Tamils of Ceylon and the Greek-Bulgarian-Turkish of the 1920s could be justified from both ethnic and religious causes (8). Yet, a difference between religious and ethnic refugees lies in the fact that religious refugees are perceived by their persecutors as having committed a "social crime", i.e., their belief, practice, or attraction of followers. These attitudes are considered to have negatively affected social order or the stability of the government, and therefore are dangerous to national security. By contrast, "guilt" committed by ethnic refugees lies not in their actions, but in their very nature and existence. Because they are born into a particular race or ethnic minority group, and the continuation of their presence in that environment is unwanted, accusation —whether true or false— is directed to them. In summary, the world has changed so much that conversion appears to be no longer able to provide an escape:
"The aristocrat of the French Revolution could save himself by becoming a 'citoyen'. The Russian bourgeois could save himself by becoming a 'tovaritch'. The German Jew could never become an Aryan" (9). And according to a remark, "It was blood itself which was now polluted —hence, nothing within the control of the victim could prevent permanent ejection from his society" (10).

The economic refugee has not experienced as high a degree of persecution as other kinds of refugees, the extent of which seems not to be unbearable or fatal. Although the motivation of escape from general privation is considered negative, the actual cause of the displacement is rather seen as a positive motivation for economic betterment (11). Thus, in most cases the action is voluntary, and usually the economic refugee can retain the option of returning to his homeland. In ancient times, this category encompasses the majority of immigrants to new lands, but in modern times it comprises, for example, the Puerto Rican refugees in the United States. For this reason, economic refugees are sometimes referred to as "economic immigrants" (12). The Mexican workers who crossed the territorial boundary to find job opportunities in the United States illustrate this concept. This example leads to the comparison between international immigration and internal migration. The situation is much the same for both cases in developing nations where internal migration occurs from rural to urban areas when people flee hardship to secure better jobs and ways of life. One of the differences is the boundary: the crossing of the city boundary as opposed to country boundary.
The class of political refugees encompasses individuals persecuted on political basis: for political cause, by political actions, and for political purpose. As cited earlier, other kinds of refugees may also be persecuted in the same manner, i.e., the change of political system from democratic to that of Communist affects both private businesses and the religious. In this frame of reference, many Laotian businessmen fled to Thailand, followed by Theravada Buddhist monks when Marxist ideology changed the traditional religion to Mahayana Buddhism. However, among various political causes, the war refugees emerge as a separate group with their distinct characteristics. It is generally the case that there are two phases in the process of seeking refuge. First, at the early stages of war or civil strife, refugees start to flow out of the affected areas. At this point, they can be called internal war refugees. When Vietnam was divided into two states, a large number of North Vietnamese refugees fled southward. Later with the collapse of South Vietnam, Vietnamese refugees escaped either to Thailand or as boat people to Hong Kong, Malaysia, etc... The transition from internal to external refugees exemplifies the second stage of flight from a domestic to international scene. However, a characteristic of both the economic and political or war refugees denotes the push-pull relationship.

In general, when an influx of refugees takes place, the categorization of the cause of displacement is necessitated in order to grant refugee status to eligible individuals. Such eligibility entitles the refugee to legal protection and material assistance which
consists of providing the refugee with relief that will prevent him from starving in the early stages of his refuge, paying his cost of transportation if he is willing to be either repatriated or is accepted by a third country, facilitating his resettlement, and helping him to find a job. Thus, those whose motives are essentially economic and eligibility is requested in order to improve their standard of living, are merely denied refugee status. On the other hand, if the motive is political and based on actual persecution or the fear thereof, the individual will be granted refugee status. In practice, however, such distinction is sometimes not feasible because of the unavailable or inadequate evidence, not to mention frequent forgeries on the part of the refugees.

While economic refugees are usually denied admission by host governments, some exceptions in the European or Middle Eastern countries exist. Temporary economic immigrants are welcome. They are defined as "the man who is invited to a country to provide labour to the factories but who is generally not given the opportunities to become a citizen." (13). In the more industrialized nations of northwest Europe, Turks, Italians, and Slavs, can be found in such programs. In some Middle Eastern nations, particularly Saudi Arabia, South Koreans and Thais—among other nationals—are working and sending money back to their families. This implies that some foreign governments, when experiencing shortage of manpower, will resort to the temporary importation of foreign work force rather than accepting
economic refugees—even though some of them are skilled—because of problems that may be generated.

II. Case Studies

Many nations of the world have had some experience with the refugees, either as first asylum or as resettlement countries. How the refugee issue is dealt with by some foreign governments will concern the central theme of this section. More specifically, in conjunction with the case of the Indochinese refugees, case studies of the Jewish refugees in selected countries will follow so that common characteristics found in those host countries could be depicted.

The Jewish Refugees

There were several movements of Jewish refugees at different times during and after World War II, from various countries of origin to various countries of asylum or resettlement, scattering all over the world. The numerical figures of the Jews exterminated by the Nazis are approximately six million, while those who managed to escape for overseas nations between 1938 and 1942 numbered around 213,000 (14). Following Germany’s occupation of the southern section of France in 1942, some 20,000 Jews from continental European countries took refuge in Switzerland (15). A few thousands fled from Austria and Germany to Denmark, then to Sweden after Denmark’s proclamation of marshall law in 1943. From Poland, 300,000 Jews escaped German control to the USSR
(16). Another wave of Jewish migration occurred again in 1946 from Rumania and Hungary. By the end of 1947, the total of Jewish refugees in Europe and the Far East was approximately 450,000 (17). However, the creation of the new State of Israel in 1948 and the passage by the United States Congress of the Displaced Persons Act, induced once again a large scale of Jewish refugees, on the one hand, to enter legally into Palestine, and on the other hand, to flee to the United States now that the frontier was open to them under the new Act. Hence, Palestine first attracted about 15,000 Jewish refugees from the end of World War II to July 1947 (18); then from that date to December 1951, another 130,000 from European countries (19). Coming to the United States, 82,000 Jewish refugees arrived under the Truman Directive of 1945 and the Displaced Persons Act of 1948 (20).

At this point, the next interesting question that follows these international movements of Jewish refugees is: What were the responses of and measures taken by various foreign countries of first asylum confronting Jewish refugee problem? The answer to this question lies in the case studies of some countries involving in the Jewish issue which are deemed necessary.

As remarked earlier, Switzerland became practically the only first country of asylum in Europe after Germany's control of the southern regions of France. It could be argued that the peculiar attitudes of Switzerland toward the refugees is the product of two principal factors: the love of freedom that is deeply rooted in the minds of the
Swiss people and the political system that adheres to the rule of perpetual neutrality (21). As a consequence, the Swiss government has always granted asylum to refugees from all nations without discrimination of religion, race, or political belief. It also considers the politics of neutrality as implying to the obligation of regular and diligent involvement in diverse aspects of humanitarian and social activities (22). Thus, besides the Jews and other victims of the Nazis and Fascists, Switzerland had provided shelter to the German revolutionaries of 1848, the Italian patriots of the 1800s, victims of the Czars' persecutions, etc...

The total number of the Jewish refugees entering Switzerland from 1943 to 1951 was 72,000 while her total refugee population during the same period was 242,000 (23). However, the majority of these refugees were only in transit for a short period of time and, therefore, the maximum number of refugees never exceeded 115,000. Most of these displaced persons managed to leave Switzerland by their own means or with the assistance of Swiss authorities or philanthropic and voluntary agencies (24). The legal and administrative aspects of Switzerland postulated that at most the refugees could obtain only a "permis de tolerance" (permit to reside on sufferance), regardless of the length of stay, and the permit could be withdrawn at any time by the Swiss government. Before and during the war, the Swiss government policy was based on the principle that Switzerland was a mere country of transit. The refugees were not allowed to work except when granted special permission (25). The frontier control officers were extremely strict,
but in 1942, under pressures from public opinion, the Swiss government found itself obligated to relax the immigration policy since the Jews were fleeing from Nazis extermination. The policy stipulated that whatever the motive for his flight might be, any refugee should be accepted if his life was in danger and if his only means of escape was to find asylum in Switzerland (26). The law promulgated in 1948 allowed aliens to request residence or resettlement permits. In general practice, the latter is issued only after a ten-year period of legal resident of Switzerland is completed, in addition to the individual's good conduct (27). Nevertheless, the Federal Government of Switzerland reserved the rights to refuse admittance, to expell, or to intern on the the grounds that:

He (the alien or refugee) has been convicted by a court of law of a felony or other serious crime;

His general conduct and behavior are such as to show that he does not wish to adapt himself to the established order of the host country or is incapable of so doing; or that, as a result of mental sickness, he is liable to endanger peace and order;

He or any dependant for whose maintainance he is responsible becomes a constant charge on public assistance. (28)

However, in the last two cases, the alien could be expelled only if it is possible for him to return to his country of origin. If the alien does not have resident permit, or the extension of which is refused, he is either put back accross the frontier when possible, or is subject to internment not exceeding two years (29).
On the other hand, most of the positions of other countries toward the Jewish refugees showed either unwillingness or reluctance. Great Britain maintained that "the United Kingdom is not a country for immigration. It is highly industrialized, fully populated, and is still faced with the problem of unemployment. For economic and social reasons, the traditional policy of granting asylum can only be applied within narrow limits." (30) The French government stated that it was in "full agreement in principle with the task (of relieving the refugees and that it) has almost exhausted her resources which unfortunately are not so boundless as her zeal to serve the cause of humanity." (31) The Scandinavian states and Belgium maintained their objection to the relaxation of immigration regulation on the grounds that the fear of undue economic competition might result from a large influx of refugees (32). From South American nations, the reactions were no less discouraging, despite the existence of vast and underdeveloped lands. The refusal was explained by their inability to absorb large numbers of refugees since they were already confronted with low wage and unemployment problems (33). Moreover, all these nations "had large German populations and extensive trade agreements with Germany; their actions were hesitant because of the fear of German disapproval." (34) However, the Dominican Republic was the only country in Latin America to offer to admit 100,000 Jewish refugees (35). Likewise, in his efforts to assist the Jewish refugees, President Roosevelt established the War Refugee Board of the United States on January 22, 1944 (36). The function of the board involved "all measures within its power to rescue the victims of enmemy oppression who are in eminent danger of
death, and otherwise to afford such victims all possible relief and assistance consistent with the successful prosecution of the war" (37). To this end, the board managed to rescue about 50,000 Jewish concentration camp inmates through the buying of their lives from the Nazis via the mediation of Switzerland (38).

In the Near East and North Africa, both the revival of the Arab nationalism and the struggle with Israel generated the flight of Jews residing in those countries. Sanguinary pogroms occurred in 1941 and 1946 in Iraq. A law was promulgated in 1950 to authorize Jews to leave the Iraqi territory after renouncing their nationality thereof. As a consequence, approximately 110,000 Jews evacuated between 1948 and 1951. But the 20,000 who chose to remain in Iraq were subjected to discriminatory policies of 1951 which included compulsory denationalization, confiscation of property, etc... (39)

The above discussion of the Jewish refugees in several countries provides an idea of how those refugees were treated and a background upon which to determine future attitudes of those countries. What were the common characteristics denoted in those cases will follow in the next section.

III. **Countries of First Asylum**

The case studies presented in section II describe some of the basic characteristics and issues found among first countries of asylum.
While differences are easily noticed, it should be kept in mind that these differences denote individual characteristics of each nation, the time period in which the movements of refugees occur, the importance of those movements on the international scene and what they mean to the world, and the feasibility of approaches taken by first countries of asylum in dealing with the refugees. Thus, it could be concluded that some common characteristics are divided into two groups, one being the refugee movements, and the other the response to those movements. The first group comprises the following conditions:

1. The flows of refugee movements are directed toward the nearest country of refuge that can provide safety and protection from the threatening regimes. In this light, the Jewish refugees in Europe first sought shelter in Switzerland before going overseas. In the same manner, Cuban refugees fleeing from Castro came to the United States. By analogy, a drowning man in the sea would try to hold onto a piece of wood or the nearest object available which could save him from drowning. At this point, he tends to avoid going further to a safer palace, i.e., an island, because of the lack of resources (in this case, energy and ability to swim) and the anticipated danger that may occur in between. Thus, he would hold onto this object until he feels strong or secure enough to proceed on his own, or until people come to his rescue. It could be therefore maintained that many of the Jewish refugees who went to Switzerland might prefer to go directly to the United States or Canada where they knew they would be granted citizenship.
2. The country of asylum must be strong enough in order the resist the influence or the threat of the regime that persecuted the refugees. Thus, a large number of Jews who first sought refuge in some Eastern European nations, such as Hungary, had to flee once more when these countries became controlled by the Germans.

3. Those who decide to evacuate to a certain country know that they stand a high chance of being provided food and shelter by the host government and by other countries and international organizations. However, a threat from a potential country of asylum can produce the opposite reactions from the refugees. In this regard, the Malaysian government announced on June 15, 1979, that Vietnamese boat people landing on Malaysia's beaches would be shot (40). Although this announcement remained a mere statement, it could intimidate further influx of refugees as opposed to the quasi-invitation of the 1979 open-door policy of the Thai Government.

4. Under the condition stated in the preceding paragraph, it could be said that the refugees also seek acceptance by countries of asylum. Since Islam is the prevalent religion in Malaysia, more than 100,000 Muslim Filipinos fled the war in the southern island of Mindanao to the Malaysian state of Sabah. However, among them were also found economic refugees.

All of the above-mentioned characteristics of first countries of asylum render the latter attractive to the refugees. However, the common reactions to these influx of refugees are as follows:
1. First countries of asylum did not intend to become so, but found themselves obligated by the circumstances. Switzerland had to relax her immigration policy when the Jews were facing extermination; by the same token, the Thai government had to implement an open-door policy when the Kampucheanas fled Vietnamese invasion to await for her assistance at the frontier -- at the same time when foreign governements and the United Nations were also putting pressures on Thailand to provide asylum.

2. First countries of asylum also agree to provide temporary refuge to the displaced persons based on humanitarian consideration. Thus, as first countries of asylum, they intend to be only a place of transit and not of permanent resettlement.

3. The fear of threat from the oppressing power is also present. Switzerland apprehended the anger of the Nazis. However, exceptions exist when the first country is a major power: Cuba was and is not in position to take revenge against the United States when the latter provided refuge to the Cuban refugees -- even the Soviet Union who supported the Cuban regime did not dare to show a strong reaction or disapproval.

4. These countries tend to impose greater restrictions on the refugees than countries of permanent resettlement. Some of the reasons are that the refugees are not considered an integral part of the population; their economic benefit from holding a job in return of their skills is not seen as to enhance the nation's economy, but rather as causing
higher rates of unemployment among the citizenry; their individual freedom is also restricted for reasons of national security or social order. It therefore seems that the refugees are allowed to remain only to exist.

5. Since first countries and the countries of origin are usually of opposing political regimes, and since the former are near or within the affected regions, it is likely that infiltration is spread among the refugees residing in the first countries. Moreover, the potential connection between the refugees and their countries of origin may pose a problem to first countries in the future. The Thai government has been experiencing this sort of problems for decades with the Vietnamese refugees and Communist Vietnam.

The above discussion of first countries of asylum, including both the refugee movements and the responses to these movements by the former, leads to the assumption that:

A country which possesses those characteristics which form attractiveness to the refugees (proximity, strength, acceptance, etc...) will automatically induce the influx of displaced persons in times of crises; the seemingly natural reactions that follow are as postulated (obligation, transit, fear, etc...)

From this assumption, this thesis postulates that:
Each time a war (or crisis) in one or every state of Indochina breaks out, the flows of refugees are directed toward Thailand as long as she can provide safety, or as long as her political regime remains that of a non-Communist nation; Thailand's basic reactions to the displaced persons will develop in the same manner.

In the light of this assumption, the case of the Indochinese refugees and their relationship with Thailand will be examined in the following section.

IV: The Indochinese Case

This section concentrates on assessing the attitudes and characteristics of Thailand as first country of asylum that has attracted the Indochinese refugees under the assumption postulated earlier. However, it is beyond the scope of this section to cover the historical events of Indochina that led to the massive movements of refugees. For this reason, Chapter II and Chapter III attempt to explicitly provide a complete coverage of those situations.

Because of the geographic location, Thailand became the nearest and strongest neighbour of the Indochinese states to provide asylum whenever these latter faced threats from the French or the Communist regimes. When the French imposed harsh measures on Vietnam, the Vietnamese refugees who fled to Laos were not as secure as those who went further to Thailand. Both Laos and Cambodia could not provide
them protection from the French. The role of proximity also implies that the refugees could still maintain their bonds with the homeland. Furthermore, nations situated in the same region usually share some common characteristics of cultural heritage, hence adaptation to a new environment seems more plausible. In terms of language barrier, the Vietnamese refugees in Thailand have experienced much more difficulty than the Cambodians whose language possesses some similarities with that of the Thai. On the other hand, the Laotian refugees have little or no difficulty in comprehending the Thai. To the recent refugees, Thailand's past experience with the Vietnamese refugees of 1945 and 1954 shows that Thailand can become once again a country of first asylum and that the hope to permanently reside in Thailand is not without sound grounds since several thousands Vietnamese refugees ended up staying in Thailand—despite the efforts to resettle in third countries or repatriation, and Thailand's announcement that she would only provide temporary refuge. Besides, as a well-known phenomenon, refugees from all-over the world are assisted by foreign governments and international organizations, although in varying degrees. By the same token, the Indochinese refugees expected similar assistance which had already been given to the earlier arrivals.

On the other hand, the reactions of the Thai government to these displaced persons did not deviate much from the common characteristics of other first countries of asylum. However, some nuances or flexibilities are found among the characteristics, not because of fundamental differences between approaches, but rather because of
individual traits of each nation and the particular circumstances involved. Basically similar to other first countries, such as Great Britain or France in the case of Jewish refugee influx, or Malaysia and the Vietnamese boat people, Thailand first closed her frontier to the Indochinese refugees. But as could be expected, the international pressures and assurances pledged to the Thai government by various foreign governments and international organizations resulted in the open-door policy of 1979. It appears that the refugee problem has called for international responsibility and assistance and that once a nation is in the position of becoming a country of first asylum, strong determination of non-involvement could hardly—if at all—resist international pressures in the name of humanitarism. It has also been the intention of Thailand to provide only temporary refuge. Yet, the situation is unlike the case of Switzerland where most of the refugee population later migrated to third countries. In this respect, the low achievement regarding repatriation or resettlement of the Thai government policy seems to stem from the fact that the majority of the Indochinese refugees are poor and poorly educated, rendering themselves unqualified for third countries. By contrast, a large portion of Switzerland's Jewish refugees were able to leave for third nations on their own or with some help from either the Swiss government or international authorities. This implies that the Thai government has been shouldering a much heavier burden. Moreover, this burden is not only disturbing her social order, economy, etc., but also represent a direct threat to the national security, as, earlier experienced with the pro-Communist Vietnamese refugees.
Chapter I: Footnotes


15. Vernant, *op.cit.*, p.62

16. Tartakover and Grossmann, *op.cit.*, p.246


20. Ibid.

21. Ibid., p.328

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid., p.331

24. Ibid., pp.330-31

25. Ibid., p.331

26. Ibid., pp.329, 332

27. Ibid., p.333

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid., p.334


31. Ibid., p.16

32. Stoessinger, *op.cit.*, p.40


34. Proceedings of the Intergovernmental Committee, *op.cit.*

35. Ibid., p.6

36. Stoessinger, *op.cit.*, p.43


38. Ibid., p.16


Chapter II

The Vietnamese Refugees in Thailand

I. Historical Background

Although it has been widely accepted that the Thai nation constitutes a relatively homogeneous population, a number of different ethnic groups can be found in various areas of the country. According to an official study (1) there are at least nineteen minority groups whose fundamental social, economic, and political characteristics have preserved their uniqueness to the degree that true assimilation into the Thai culture has become almost sterile. At the same time, it could be argued, on the one hand, that these ethnic characteristics had been adopted into the Thai culture; on the other hand, it could also be stipulated that these distinctive traits were among the bases for the foundation of the Thai culture itself since some ethnic groups had migrated into the area before the Thai people, and some others were old inhabitants of the peninsula. From the geographical standpoint, the northeastern part of Thailand is inhabited by the Kui (2), the Vietnamese, and the Khmer minority groups, besides the Thai population. In the northern region can be found the Lisu (3), the Lahu (4), the Lu (5), the Khu (6), the Shan (7), the Nuo (8), the Yao (9), the Hmu (10), the Karen (11), the Akha (12), and the Lao (13). In central Thailand reside the Mon (14), the Indians, and the Pakistanis. Finally, the South has been the habitat of the Malays (15). History shows that most of these minority groups had migrated into Thailand as refugees of different kinds and at different periods, although some of them were among the original occupants of Thai territory. However, the
interests of this chapter shall limit the topic to a discussion of the
history of Vietnamese refugees living in Thailand. The reason is that
Vietnamese refugees have been viewed differently from other minority
groups by both the Thai government and the Thai people. Whereas most
minority groups are referred to as "native ethnic groups", the
Vietnamese are among those classified as "alien ethnic groups" (16)
—like the case of Malay ethnics and their problems of secession with
the Thai government—because they perceive themselves as distinct from
the Thai people, attempt to resist assimilation, do not want to
cooperate with the Thai government, and are considered foreigners by
the Thai. Moreover, factors such as negative attitudes towards
Communist ideologies, fear of the Communist threat, and evidence
indicating linkages between many Vietnamese refugees and North Vietnam,
have compelled the Thai government to consider and implement policy
towards Vietnamese refugees with greater caution. From this point of
departure, refugees matters have attracted particular attention from
the government to further develop or change refugee policy to suit
these circumstances. Later on it extended this policy to cover both
Laotian and Cambodian displaced persons after the dramatic change of
political regimes in Indochina resulting from its fall into Communist
hands in 1975.

A. The "Old Vietnamese" Refugees

Vietnamese refugees in Thailand are distinctively divided into two
major categories in terms of the time periods of immigration, motives
for leaving their homeland and seeking refuge in Thailand, locations of resettlement, social and economic standings, and political involvement both within their own communities and towards the governments of North Vietnam and Thailand.

The so-called Yuán Cáo translated into English as "Old Vietnamese" (17) are descendants of refugees who immigrated to Thailand during the 1850s. This category also includes a limited number of Vietnamese Catholic families living in Bangkok and possibly in Ayutthaya during the 1780s. Among these earliest immigrants were found political refugees consisting of soldiers and mariners who were the followers of Prince Ahn (19) or the future Emperor Gia Long, who returned to Vietnam in 1787 and acquired the contested title of emperor in 1802 (20). But behind him, many of his soldiers chose to remain in Bangkok and serve in the Siamese army.

The next large group, comprising of approximately five thousand Vietnamese (21), sought refuge in Thailand around the 1850s. Converted to Roman Catholicism, they had fled from the regions then called Cochinchina (22) and Annam (23) for fear of religious persecution by Emperor Minh Mang and his successors Thieu Tri and Tu Duc (24). They settled in central and southeastern provinces of Chanthaburi, Trat, Rayong, Chon Buri, Samut Songkhram, and Bangkok (25). They originally sought temporary refuge which later became permanent after having adapted to a Thai environment which offered them religious freedom and economic opportunities. At the same time they were discouraged by the
quasi-primitive means of communication with and transportation to their homeland.

The third group, which constituted of several hundreds of Vietnamese, immigrated to Thailand during the latter part of the nineteenth century (26). They were political refugees who fled from their country to free themselves from French domination and oppression after Tourane was captured by the French in 1858 (27). The majority of them came from Thanh Hoa, Nghe An, and Ha Tinh (28), and settled in the northeastern parts of Thailand, namely in Sakon Nakhon, Loei Nong Han, Nong Khai, and Nakhon Phanom (29).

Also included in this Yuan Cao category can be found the fourth group of Vietnamese who immigrated to Thailand around 1930. Coming from the provinces of Vinh and Ha Tinh—which later became part of North Vietnamese territory—they were pro-Communist in ideology and had participated in anti-French movements in Vietnam (30). They mainly settled in northeastern provinces of Sakon Nakhon and Nakhon Phanom where they later were able to exercise a powerful political influence upon Vietnamese immigrants of the late nineteenth century, despite their small number (31).

Besides the above-mentioned factors considered in the classification of the "Old Vietnamese" and the "New Vietnamese" refugees, the Thai government had taken into account a legitimate issue: the "Old Vietnamese" refugees were those who immigrated to
Thailand prior to 1927 at a time when Thailand had not yet established an immigration policy and regulations under the Constitution of the Kingdom (32). Hence, their official status differs from that of the "New Vietnamese" refugees, and a different policy of control is required by the Thai government.

B. The "New Vietnamese" Refugees

The more recent waves of Vietnamese immigrants are referred to as the *Yuan Mai* or the "New Vietnamese" refugees (33). This period started with a large group of Vietnamese who fled to Thailand during World War II and the immediate post war years (34). Thus, from 1945 to 1954, an estimated 50,000 to 60,000 Vietnamese (35) took refuge in Thailand, especially in 1946 after French forces had countered the Vietnamese organization established in Laos to obstruct French post war reoccupation of Indochina (36). However, controversies arise as to the exact numbers of Vietnamese refugees who fled to Thailand during this period. Estimates vary to a great extent and range from 30,000 to 100,000 refugees (37), with an official estimate by the Thai government amounted to 45,700 (38). The most justified estimate appears to be 50,000 to 60,000 (39), including both repatriated refugees from 1962 to 1964, and those remaining in Thailand.

The majority of these "New Vietnamese" refugees who penetrated Thailand from the northeastern border settled along the Mekong river and were specifically concentrated in the provinces of Nong Khai, Sakon
Nakhon, Nakhon Phanom, and Ubon Rajathanee, while quite a few chose to live in Pratun Buri (40).

C. Repatriation

In retrospect, the primary cause of the large influx of Vietnamese refugees into Thailand between 1945 and 1947 was the French attempt to retake control over Indochina and their attacks against Vietnamese resistance groups. However, the French were finally defeated at Dien Bien Phu on May 8, 1954 (41). Following this event, the Geneva Conference took place from June 16 through July 21, 1954, and came up with a final declaration concerning the problem of restoring peace in Indochina. The declaration stipulated that:

1. The Conference takes note of the arguments ending hostilities in Cambodia, Laos, and Viet Nam and organizing international control and the supervision of the execution of the provisions of these arguments.

4. The Conference takes note of the clauses in the agreement on the cessation of hostilities in Viet Nam prohibiting the introduction into Viet Nam of foreign troops and military personnel as well as of all kinds of arms and munitions...

7. The Conference declares that, so far as Viet Nam is concerned, the settlement of political problems, effected on the basis of respect for the principles of independence, unity and territorial integrity, shall permit the Vietnamese people to enjoy the fundamental freedoms, guaranteed by democratic institutions established as a result of free general elections by secret ballot...

8. The provisions of the agreements on the cessation of hostilities intended to ensure the protection of individuals and of property must be most strictly applied and must, in particular, allow everyone in Viet Nam to decide freely in which zone he wishes to live. (42)
With French troops gone, and peace and stability seemingly assured in Indochina after the Geneva Conference of 1954, the government of Thailand found that it was an appropriate time to lessen its refugee burdens. To this end, Thailand initiated negotiations with both North and South Vietnam in order to repatriate Vietnamese refugees to their homeland. Thus, in April 1955, the refugee matter was brought up at the Asian-African Conference in Bandung, and the Thai representatives informally discussed the issues with their North Vietnamese counterparts. Unfortunately, this Bandung Conference produced no desired effects during the next three years (43). The problem seemed to be that, on the one hand, since most refugees had originally fled from North Vietnam, they preferred to remain in Thailand rather than evacuate to the Republic of Vietnam (44). On the other hand, the latter appeared reluctant to admit a large number of refugees (45) probably due to economic and security reasons. In fact, this resulted in the Thai government changing its intentions about repatriation; it instead required that these Vietnamese be settled in restricted areas which comprised the provinces of Nong Khai, Sakon Nakhon, Nakhon Phanom, Ubon Rajathanee, and Prachin Buri (46). Later on, in August 1958, the Thai Red Cross Society was put in charge by the Thai Foreign Ministry to discuss the possibility of repatriation with the North Vietnam Red Cross Society. From a political standpoint, the Thai government’s urge for repatriation was raised by its concern that since Vietnamese Communist pressures were being imposed on Laos, they as well could be applied against northeastern Thailand (47). To the government of North Vietnam, accepting the Thai proposal would be beneficial on
two grounds: in the first place, Hanoi could prove to the world its concern for and responsibility to Vietnamese refugees claimed as citizens by both North and South Vietnamese governments, while denouncing Saigon's hesitance. Secondly, being diplomatically isolated from the non-Communist Asian countries, the opening of negotiations with Thailand seemed to improve North Vietnamese standing, although the negotiations were not at a diplomatic level (48). Negotiations between the two governments were scheduled to take place in June, with the delegates to meet in Rangoon. But the North Vietnamese delegation intentionally delayed the meeting and attempted to shift the discussions to procedural questions, which were not the focal issue and not the reason why the meeting had been called (48). This attitude of North Vietnam seemed to reflect her intention to be diplomatically recognized rather than to honestly desire to help the refugees. The patience of the Thai government seemed to fade away when General Prephat, then Minister of Interior, announced that the Hanoi government appeared unconcerned about repatriation by shifting the discussion to Vietnamese living conditions in Thailand. In his own words, he declared that "Since neither North Vietnam or South Vietnam wants these people, we will have to move them from sensitive border areas... We want to move them as far in land from the Mekong as possible but it has not yet been decided how far in land they should be brought." (50) As intended, this announcement induced North Vietnamese agreement in August 1959 to accept refugees. Moreover, the government of South Vietnam also agreed to accept repatriated refugees who had abandoned Communist ideology and did not want to return to North Vietnam (51).
Thus, the Rangoon conference, which took place from June 20 to August 14, 1959, allowed the Vietnamese refugees to register freely, with the cost of transportation by sea being equally shared by both the governments of Thailand and North Vietnam. Repatriation was to be proceeded as quickly as the circumstances would allow, with a limit of thirty months (52). It was reported that approximately 70,000 Vietnamese registered in November of 1959 for repatriation (53), although the official estimates were less than 50,000 (54). When the thirty-month period provided by the Rangoon Accord came to its expiration in July 1962, an estimated 35,000 refugees had returned to their homeland in fifty-eight shipments (55). But before the Rangoon Accord ever came to its expiration, both Thailand and North Vietnam announced that they would continue repatriation until all the registered refugees returned to North Vietnam. Yet, due to delay by North Vietnam, it was not until December 1962 that the new agreement was signed by both parties and the first shipment resumed in March of the following year (56). At a rate of six hundred refugees per month (57), the shipments continued until July 1964 when the government of North Vietnam terminated the agreement, raising the issue of the Gulf of Tonkin incident involving the American and North Vietnamese naval forces as its motive for cancellation (58). But behind the concern for safety for the refugees mentioned by Hanoi, lay the fact that the North Vietnam government was in need of an adequate supply of food products for its people (59). As statistics show, even though more than forty thousand Vietnamese were repatriated, still as many as 32,501 Vietnamese who had registered to be repatriated remained in Thailand.
(60). It should be noted that among the "New Vietnamese" refugees who were repatriated —most of them were living in the provinces of Nong Khai, Nakhon Phanom, and Sakon Nakhon— many old Vietnamese with legal alien status had also registered for repatriation (61).

This was the historical background of the earlier influx of Vietnamese refugees. What Thailand had learned in those days turned out to be problems which remain unsolved until the present time. Those experiences were still resonant in its memories when history repeated itself once again and another sea of refugees merged into Thailand.

II. Current Situation

It could be stipulated that each Indochina conflict has driven a huge influx of refugees into Thailand. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the "New Vietnamese" sought refuge in Thailand during the First Indochina War which was caused by the French attempt to maintain control over its colonial possessions, and which lasted from 1945 to 1954. Later on, in an effort to protect the interests of the free world nations against Communist imperialism and aggression, the United States found itself involved in the Vietnam War which resulted in the Second Indochina War from 1959 to 1975. As an inevitable consequence, another flow of refugees fled to Thailand. Likewise, the same situation occurred when the Third Indochina War broke out between China, Vietnam, and Kampuchea in the later part of 1978.
A. The Fall of Indochina in 1975

Chronologically, the fall of Phnom Penh on April 17, 1975, was immediately followed by the fall of South Vietnam only a few weeks later, on April 30, 1975, and that of Laos a few months later, on August 23, 1975.

Cambodia

When Cambodia gained its independence from the French in 1953, Prince Norodom Sihanouk governed the country under a foreign policy that inclined toward China. The relationship between the two countries was already based upon a friendly and non-aggressive behavior under the treaty of 1960 signed by both parties. As a result, this treaty led Sihanouk to vigorously condemn Vietnamese Communist troops in Cambodia (62). Taking advantage of Sihanouk's absence from his country during his visit to the Soviet Union and China with the conviction that these latter could intervene against North Vietnam, Lon Nol, then Prime Minister, overthrew Sihanouk on March 18, 1970 (63). While in refuge in Peking, Sihanouk formed the Gouvernement Royal d'Union Nationale Khmère (GRUNK) which immediately received the support of Khieu Samphan who led the Khmer Communist resistance fighters or the Khmer Rouge against the Khmer Republic founded by President Lon Nol. The United States Air Force supported the invasion of South Vietnamese troops into Cambodia by bombing large areas of the country (64). The intensification of the struggle between the Khmer Rouge and Lon Nol
forces terminated with the defeat of this latter on April 17, 1975. This allowed Sihanouk to return to Phnom Penh on September 9 and to become the head of state without real power. He therefore went to Paris and New York, and announced the non-alignment policy of his country (65). Upon his return to Phnom Penh, he presided the Council of Ministers which proclaimed the Democratic State of Cambodia under the new constitution on January 9, 1976. Sihanouk was unanimously elected head of state on March 20 of the same year (66). But partly because of the differences in opinion as far as the politics of the Democratic Kampuchea government were concerned, Sihanouk resigned from his position. However, he was confined to his Khemarin Palace and was not liberated until January 6, 1979—the day before the Vietnamese army seized power over Phnom Penh—when he left for Peking (67).

It was reported that 70,000 Vietnamese troops had invaded Kampuchea by the middle of 1978 and easily succeeded in occupying large portions of Kampuchea. When 1978 came to its end, a hundred thousand Vietnamese troops, backed by artillery, tanks, and aircraft, took control of Phnom Penh on January 7, 1979 (68). As a consequence, a pro-Vietnamese government was founded and presided over by Heng Samrin (69). Vietnamese aggression as well as the tragedy created by Pol Pot were denounced by Sihanouk before the United Nations Security Council. Sihanouk also called for a resolution providing for the evacuation of Vietnamese troops, but it was vetoed by the Soviet Union. It was not until November 14, 1979, that the United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution demanding the withdrawal of foreign forces from
Kampuchea (70). The results of these efforts toward peace and human rights were nil. The UN resolution was not respected by the Vietnamese government, and as yet true peace is not assured in Kampuchea.

South Vietnam

Vietnam is an unfortunate nation torn apart by wars. For decades, its people have suffered misfortune, but its governments seem to be more concerned with power politics and aggression. Yet the Vietnamese people have also proved their ability to adapt to new environments and to economically prosper within a very short period. This is particularly true for those living overseas.

Under the French colonialism, Vietnam was divided into three administrative regions, Tonkin in the North, Annam in the center, and Cochinchina in the South (71). These three areas were ruled through Hanoi. The French managed to maintain firm control for several decades despite anti-French Vietnamese nationalist and Communist movements. From 1940 to 1945, France—then overrun by Nazis—established a French government in Vietnam which was finally overthrown toward the end of World War II. Ho Chi Minh, who was the leader of the Viet Minh and the Indo-China Communist Party, declared the independence of Vietnam in 1945 (72). However, the French did not give in and attempted to repossess Vietnam. War broke out between the French and the Viet Minh. In spite of the disagreement over France's effort to resume control over Vietnam, the United States financially supported the French (73).
In American eyes, this war was viewed as a means to blockade Communist expansion since Mao Tse-tung had taken control of China and the Korean War had begun. The American efforts were in vain. The French were defeated at Dien Bien Phu in 1954, following which the Geneva Agreement was signed to cease hostilities in Indochina. In 1956 Ngo Dinh Diem, backed by American support, proclaimed himself President of the Republic of South Vietnam, refusing to observe free elections of a national government of Vietnam as a whole. Diem's policy of harsh repression against Communists and former Viet Minh nationalists led to the formation of the National Liberation Front (NFL) in South Vietnam in 1960 and guerrilla warfare. The United States established the U.S. Military Assistance Command in South Vietnam and in 1963 seemed to acquiesce a military coup against Diem who was assassinated in the process (74). The following three-year period was one of political upheaval involving several coups d'état, showing the government's instability and allowing Communist progress. But this political upheaval seemed to be stabilized when Ky and Thieu came to power. Yet the struggle continued between the government and Communist troops as reflected in the Tet Offensive of 1968 when the NFL entered Saigon. Anti-Vietnam War movements in the United States led to the withdrawal of the American forces from South Vietnam although equipment continued to be shipped to Saigon. Seeing a weakened South Vietnam, North Vietnam started a conventional war supported by China. Saigon fell into Communist hands on April 30, 1975.
Laos

It could be argued that Laos possesses a population that is predominantly rural, easy-going, uneducated, and unpolitical (75). Partly due to this background and because of the limited availability of information concerning Communist movements during World War II, researchers simply argue that Japanese domination of Indochina in March 1945 provided an opportunity for anti-colonialist activities (76). The Crown Prince declared Laos's independence from France, supported by Lao nationalists and aristocrats as well as by Vietnamese living in Laos. At the same time, Ho Chi Minh supported the Lao Issara led by Prince Souphanouvong, Prince Phetsarath, and Kaysone Phomvihane. This Free Lao government would soon be overrun by the French in 1946 (77). Kaysone returned to Laos in 1949 from his political asylum in Thailand and founded a Lao People's Liberation Army. In August of the following year, the Lao Free Front and Lao Resistance Government were established (78). Under the Geneva ceasefire agreement of 1954, the Royal Lao Government and the Lao Patriotic Front—founded in 1956—agreed to form a coalition government (79). The coalition soon resulted in conflict between the right and the left. In 1959, the Central Committee of the Vietnamese Workers Party—the former Indochinese Communist Party—resorted to armed struggle in South Vietnam, using infiltration routes through eastern Laos and assisted the Pathet Lao in taking control of that area. The North Vietnamese also penetrated the Ho Chi Minh trail in the southeast. During the next period of over a decade, the Royal Lao Army proved ineffective despite American support,
while the Pathet Lao progressively seized almost four-fifths of the country. Around 1973 the Pathet Lao formed a government base in Vientiane and a parliamentary base in Luang Prabang (80) — where the king resided. The unexpected collapse of Cambodia and South Vietnam intensified and accelerated the struggle for power in Laos. On August 23, 1975, the Pathet Lao seized control of Vientiane (81). In other words, it seems that Communist Control of Laos was a mere by-product of what happened to Phnom Penh and Saigon. Would Laos collapse if the first two did not?

**Impact on Thailand**

The tragedy of Indochina has put Thailand into a very difficult situation. Obviously, Communists have reached her door. Besides the impact on her politics, economy, and the morale of her people, the influx of refugees into her territory has become a major problem. Thailand is more affected by refugee problems than any other country.

According to a study, the first wave of Cambodian refugees started to immigrate to Thailand slightly before the fall of Phnom Penh and continued until September 1976. They numbered 16,650 (82) and have been classified as land refugees. Another group called illegal immigrants was composed of 433 Cambodians (83). Referring to the classification in Chapter I, the illegal immigrants differ from both refugees and displaced persons on the grounds that the motives for their displacement are rather positive and economically beneficial. In
1979, the "open door" policy for Cambodian displaced persons under the Kriangsak administration allowed holding centres at Khao I Dang to assist 112,151 Cambodians, Sa Kaew 24,487, Maircot 6,081, and Kamput 2,670 (84). The Second Indochinese War brought to Thailand 1,590 Vietnamese land refugees and 5,770 Boat People (85). Since Laos shares the same border as Thailand, Laotian displaced persons are land refugees and totaled 140,909 in 1976. Only 102 Laotians were classified as illegal immigrants (86).

However, figures vary according to the methods and factors used: some sources consider only the total number of refugees within the country at one point in time or during one period, while others are more comprehensive. The Thai government has published over-all estimates that take into account all the Indochinese refugees who have fled to Thailand. There were approximately 300,000 Kampuchean refugees during the period 1975 to 1979, but only 73,477 of them have been settled in third countries, and the rest have remained in Thailand. Besides, 470,000 Kampuchean are concentrated at the Thai-Kampuchean border (87). Of the 74,000 Vietnamese, 63,596 have departed Thailand for third countries. The Laotian refugees, including the hill-tribesmen, numbered 270,000 and 167,243 were accepted to third countries (88).

III. Classification of Refugees
Among the Indochinese refugees in Thailand, the Vietnamese case can offer a more complete historical development of how refugees have been dealt with. Since there have been several periods during which Vietnamese refugees immigrated into Thailand, a chronological classification of the types of refugees seems to be a most logical approach to the understanding of different policies of the government of Thailand. In this light, chronological classification not only describes events as the sequence of phenomena in the historical sense, but it provides a broader perspective and a better explanatory power. According to the Thai government (89), the "Old Vietnamese" were those who took refuge in Thailand before 1927, at a time when Thailand had not yet established an immigration law. These people were, therefore, granted Thai nationality. The second group comprised refugees who legally entered Thailand and had gone through the immigration process; but there were also illegal immigrants who were later on allowed to settle by the Thai government. Third, there were Vietnamese refugees who illegally entered Thailand after their flight from the First Indochina War against the French around 1945. The last category includes descendants of Vietnamese refugees classified in category II and III. Because they were born in the Thai territory, they were given Thai nationality. However, they lost their Thai nationality under the amendment put into effect on December 13, 1972. The descendants have formed a population of twenty thousand people, and when combined with older generations, Thailand's Vietnamese refugees totaled 41,342 prior to the fall of Saigon.
The new classification of refugees who entered Thailand after 1975 differs to a certain extent from the previous ones. This new influx is no longer composed of a single ethnic group, but rather of people from the three Indochinese states. Although a distinction is made between the Second and the Third Indochina War refugees, these latter are rather classified as either political or economic refugees. One of the criteria used in this categorization is based on the individual's desire to return to his homeland as opposed to the desire to go to a third country or to remain in Thailand. To this end, a survey was conducted, and based upon personal interviews, it turned out that only ten percent of the refugees showed a desire to be repatriated, whereas most of them chose to be resettled in third countries, with only a limited number wishing to remain in Thailand (90).
Chapter II: Footnotes


2. Despite incomplete information, researchers agree that the Kai had originally inhabited large areas of Thailand and Cambodia, and those in the northeastern Thailand were believed to be the Veddooid extractions immigrated from India. For further information see Chin You-di, "Indirect Evidences of Prehistoric Migrations in Thailand," (Bangkok: Ninth Pacific Science Congress, 1963) p. 31, and Erik Seidenfaden, "Review of Books", Journal of the Thai Research Society, XXXIV, 1943, p. 74.

3. "Minority Groups in Thailand", op. cit., p. 312. The Lisu are an ethnic group among the Mongoloid peoples who are of Tiberto-Burman origin.

4. Ibid., p. 363. The Lahu are Mongoloid of Tiberto-Burman origin like the Lisu.

5. Ibid., p. 420. As a Mongoloid people, the Lu belong to the Lao-Thai family.

6. Ibid., p. 455. It could be postulated that the Khmu inhabited northern Thailand as early as before the Thai migrations of the Thirteenth century. Differences in their origins are hard to reconcile. Some sources say that the Khmu are descendants of the Lao; others, of the Mon-Kmer; and still others of Chinese extractions.

7. Ibid., p. 497. The Shan are referred to as the Tai in terms of ethnic origin, language, and history. A Mon-Taic race were inhabitants of the Yangtze River basin in China where was derived the single ethnic origin of the Tai and Mon ethnic groups.

8. Ibid., p. 578. The Meo are the Mongoloid people whose ethnic origin remains doubtful. Depending on studies, the Meo have been classified as the Mon-Annam, Tiberto-Burman, Sinitic racial stocks, etc...

9. John F. Embree, Ethnic Groups in Northern Southeast Asia, (Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1950) p. 91. Most studies have stipulated that the Yao are of Mongoloid origin, but other sources have argued that the Yao are of Indonesian or the Mon-Khmer extractions.

10. The Hau have assimilated different cultural patterns and possess no homogeneous social, political, and geographical patterns. They are known as Yunnanese traders immigrated into the northern part of Thailand, Laos, and Burma over a century

11. W.R. Geddes, "The Hill Tribes of Thailand", (SEATO Record, IV, No.6, December 1965) p.16. The ethnic background of the Karen remains doubtful. Although it has been generally accepted that they are descendants of the Mongoloid, some sources still dispute that their origin was either Chinese, Tibertan, Mon-Khmer, Lao-Thai, or even Jewish.

12. Ibid., p.16. The Akhu are of Mongoloid extraction, from the branch of Tiberto-Burman.

13. Kenneth T. Young, The Hill Tribes of Northern Thailand, p.51. Despite the uncertain origin of the Lawa, it is widely accepted that they are Austronesian who had come to southern Thailand, Malaya, or Cambodia, more than two thousand years ago.

14. George L. Harris et al., U.S. Army Area Handbook for Thailand, (Washington, D.C.: Special Operations Research Service, 1963) p.60; Brian Harrison, South-east Asia: A Short History. (London: Macmillan and Co., 1960) p.17. As a Mongoloid people, the origin of the Mon is uncertain. Generally, it is agreed that they came from southern and western China by the first century and formed the population of Southeast Asia, from Burma to Vietnam. They are said to be closely related to the Khmer groups.


19. Ibid., pp.23-24

20. Minority Groups in Thailand, op.cit., p.39


22. Ibid.

23. Harris et al, op.cit., p.72
24. Bui-Quang-Tung, op.cit., p.440
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
28. Bui-Quang-Tung, op.cit., p.440
29. Harris et al., op.cit., p.72
30. Bui-Quang-Tung, op.cit., p.440
31. Ibid.
32. From a briefing by H.E. Asa Boonyapratusang, former Deputy-Director of the Department of International Organization, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bangkok, Thailand.
33. Bui-Quang-Tung, op.cit., p.440
34. Poole, op.cit., p.23
35. Bui-Quang-Tung, op.cit., p.440
36. Ibid.
37. Minority Groups in Thailand, op.cit., p.40
40. Bui-Quang-Tung, op.cit., p.41
43. Poole, op.cit., p.57

46. Bui-Quang-Tuang, op.cit., p.41

47. Poole, op.cit., p.57

48. Ibid., p.58

49. Bangkok World, June 22, 26, and July 2, 1959

50. Ibid., July 11, 18, and 21, 1959

51. Ibid., August 4, 1959

52. For a complete detail on the Rangoon Accord, see Poole, op.cit., pp.136-42

53. U.S. Congress, Hearings on Refugee Problems in South Vietnam and Laos, p.8

54. Poole, op.cit., p.62

55. Ibid., p.63

56. Ibid., pp.64-65

57. As opposed to the minimum requirement of one thousand refugees per month under the Rangoon Accord.

58. Poole, op.cit., pp.65-66

59. Bangkok World, February 16, 1965

60. Ibid., November 14, 1964; Bangkok Post, November 11 and 13, 1964

61. "Viets Who Can Stay Applied for Hanoi Journey", in Bangkok World, December 1, 1959


63. Ibid.

64. Ibid.; See Marvin and Susan Gettleman, and Lawrence and Carol Kaplan, Conflict in Indochina: A Reader on the Widening War in Laos and Cambodia, (New York: Random House, 1970)

65. Ibid., pp.40-41. See Russell H. Fifield, American in Southeast Asia: The Roots of Commitment, (New York:

66. Ibid., p.41


69. Heng Samrin was the former president of the Revolutionary Council of Democratic Kampuchea.

70. Garry, op.cit., p.41


72. Ibid.


75. MacAlister Brown, "The Communist Seizure of Power in Laos", p.18

76. Ibid.

77. For more detail see Brown, op.cit., pp.18-19

78. Ibid., p.19

79. Ibid., p.20

80. Ibid., p.21

81. Ibid., p.22


83. Ibid.
84. Ibid. The exact numbers of refugees are subject to change due to the increase of refugee population through births or new arrivals, repatriation, or resettlement.

85. Ibid.

86. Ibid.

87. This figure is now adjusted to approximately 300,000 according to Sawanit Kongsiri (of the Foreign Ministry, Bangkok, Thailand), in his briefing about the Indochinese refugees in Thailand given at the University of Houston on June 23, 1984.


89. According to the Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

90. Thompson, op.cit., pp.125-26
Chapter III
Dealing with the Refugees

It is not an easy task for any one government to effectively deal with its own people; it is even harder for a foreign government to deal with refugees, a situation where not only domestic affairs are involved, but also the role of international relations. How each government devises its refugee policy is an important and interesting issue. This chapter concentrates on how the government of Thailand formulates its refugee policy, both in the past and the present time. The refugee problem, in itself, does suggest how the government should respond, but the government's response rather reflects the outcome of interaction between different factors subjected to influence, constraints, and feasibility.

I. Thailand's Refugee Policy and Strategy of Control

The rationale behind the classification of refugees mentioned in the preceding chapter helps explain and justify the Thai government's policy toward refugees. Here again, the present Indochinese refugee policy has taken root in previous policies developed for Vietnamese refugees. From this standpoint, policy has undergone changes under different governments of Thailand and has been affected by the relationship between Thailand and the two Vietnams in each period.

Thailand's policy between 1946 and 1947 inclined toward encouraging the Vietnamese refugees to join Ho Chi Minh in the struggle against the French. A Vietnamese volunteer battalion was established
under the Royal Thai Army for this purpose. The remaining Vietnamese refugees were spread throughout the Northeastern region without any control by the Thai government. However, in 1947, their residency areas were restricted to border provinces. In 1951 the Police Department provided regulations for the control of Vietnamese refugees. Later on, because of the increased Communist aggression in Asia, especially in the Indochinese states, and because the Thai government had conceived that Vietnamese refugees might create problems, the policy of 1958 considered evacuating these refugees to Tarutao island. However, this project had to be dropped because of its high cost—approximately forty million bahts per year, equivalent to two million US dollars—that might generate social and political problems.

For these reasons, Thailand initiated negotiations with North Vietnam through the Red Cross Society. But when repatriation ceased in 1964, the Thai government still planned to send back all the remaining refugees, and while further negotiations were in process, the 1964 policy provided that these Vietnamese be strictly supervised in restricted areas. The 1970 policy based on previous policies stipulated that Vietnamese refugees should be repatriated to either North or South Vietnam according to their will. But before repatriation resumed, stricter control was implemented under a special agency set up to serve this purpose, with the assistance of the Communist Suppression Operations Command (CSOC) until the Ministry of Interior was ready. By the same token, all these governmental agencies aimed at closely cooperate with each other and efforts were made in screening out those Vietnamese who were pro-Communist and behaved in a
manner that was deemed dangerous to the Thai national security. These people were retained in remote areas so as to prevent communication with other refugees, while awaiting to be repatriated or forced into exile. At the same time, psychological measures were taken to reward well-behaved Vietnamese by treating them like Thai citizens, while harsh measures were imposed on the hard-headed. Education was also provided to the descendants of Vietnamese refugees, either in Thai schools or in special educational institutes (1).

Besides formulating refugee policy in general, a strategy of control was devised to render effective the implementation of policy. To this end, the Thai government oversaw Vietnamese activities and has made a list of the acceptable or harmful Vietnamese refugees, including their biographies. The suspects include many Vietnamese refugees, Vietnamese aliens, and Thais of Vietnamese extraction. As for those registered for repatriation under the Rangoon Accord, they have been strictly supervised and allowed to be involved only in activities necessary for minimum subsistence. Only those who have offered cooperation with the Thai government are given some privileges. It is also Thailand’s aim to annihilate all Vietnamese organizations that show signs of expanding influence over other Vietnamese refugees and their descendants. By the same token, their political role has been minimized. In case of border crises, a policy provided for the Vietnamese refugees to be completely segregated from Thai people and prevented from giving support to the intruders. However, this segregation policy has not yet been used. As well, the refugees are
only allowed to hold certain jobs that are not vital to the economy. Finally, those who have escaped from the restricted areas of residence are brought back. On the other hand, the well-behaved Vietnamese are given support by the Thai government. They are allowed greater mobility, given the highest educational opportunity of the area, or sent for higher education outside restricted areas (2).

II. Current Policy

In 1975, following the collapse of the Indochinese states, Vietnamese refugees continued to be perceived by the Thai government as more dangerous than the Cambodian or Laotian refugees. From this frame of reference, problems of Vietnamese refugees have been given a highest priority in negotiations with North Vietnam before opening diplomatic relations. Thailand wishes to repatriate as many Vietnamese as possible or to find them countries of permanent resettlement; on the other hand, the "well-behaved" Vietnamese who wish to stay in Thailand have also been given support by the Thai government in their integration into Thai society. They may also be accorded alien status and later on Thai nationality (3).

In 1979 the Thai government put into effect a policy on Indochinese refugees agreed to by all parties concerned that Thailand would provide temporary refuge for these displaced persons on the assurances pledged by the United States and the international community that these latter would provide favourable resettlement opportunities
to the refugees, and would maintain a close cooperation with and assistance to the Thai government. In this light, the Thai government has also classified these refugees into two categories. First, the Indochinese displaced persons are those who left their country of nationality or of habitual residence for fear of persecution and sought refuge in Thailand following Communist control of Indochina in 1975. Second, Kampuchean illegal immigrants are those who fled from Kampuchea after the Vietnamese invasion and Heng Samrin's seizure of power from Pol Pot in early 1980 (4).

Compelled by circumstances, the Thai National Assembly passed a policy in 1980 regarding displaced persons. This policy postulates that the government of Thailand will keep a consistent attitude out of humanitarian considerations in conjunction with national sovereignty, security, and safety interests (5). Thus, according to a Thai government official announcement, Thailand's assistance to the refugees has been a reaction to a situation requiring humanitarian response. However, under this policy the government of Thailand has decided to approach in a political and diplomatic manner, making appeals to the international community, international organizations, and prospective countries of resettlement to accept an apportioned number of refugees.

The objective policy still in use in 1984 obviously shows that the Thai government has been considering both resettlement in third countries and repatriation as a solution to the problem. While financial and material contributions from foreign governments and
international organizations are necessary and helpful, their use tends to be limited to the relief stage and temporary needs. Unfortunately, this does not represent a permanent solution for Thailand which will have to solve remaining problems once these contributions cease. On the other hand, resettlement offers a permanent solution to first countries of asylum and reflects international cooperation with the burdens being shared among concerned parties so that no one is unfairly responsible. By August 31, 1979, a total of 108,430 Indochinese refugees had departed from Thailand to twenty-two third countries (6). The other alternative, repatriation, while more difficult to realize given the circumstances, seems to be the best solution. Why should foreign governments be responsible for the well-being of those uprooted people while their own governments are persecuting them? This question is addressed to the Vietnamese and could not be applied to the Kampuchean fleeing Vietnamese threat, for the Vietnamese government did not care about its own people and expelled them at the risk of their own lives. But here again, if one considers giving refuge to those persecuted by foreign invasion, one will be confronted with the issue of racial discrimination instead of humanitarian concern: war refugees should be assisted on equal basis for humanitarianism involves human beings as a whole. However, as far as repatriation is concerned, Thailand has been working on the Cambodian case through the United Nations. Thailand has demanded the withdrawal of Vietnamese forces from Kampuchea and is supported by 105 nations (7). At the same time, Thailand has been supporting the three-party government of Sihanouk, Sonsane, and the Kampuchean Independent Front to fight against
Vietnamese troops. At the beginning of 1979, Sihanouk's troops could not fight against Vietnamese forces, but his troops became stronger in 1983, and according to the Thai government's report, have attracted more than 260,000 Kampuchean (8). Yet questions arise about resettlement or repatriation policy. How far can the Thai government push its policy? How can it convince foreign nations to accept a larger number of refugees? Or how can it get involved governments to honour their commitment? What should Thailand do if the refugees are "forgotten" and left in Thailand as has been the case of the Second Indochinese War? An answer to this last question reveals that Thailand's alternative policy is to accept no more refugees, for there are about 300,000 Kampuchean as of June 1984 (9) awaiting assistance at the border and that in the next three or four years Thailand can expect another flow of refugees if present situations worsen.

III. Comparative Refugee Policy

The refugee policy discussed in the previous section represents a partial coverage of the Thai government's response to the refugee problem since it was formulated for the Indochinese case. Although it could be argued that Thailand's response to refugee situation is governed by the conceptual framework of national interests, the other side of the picture reflects different degree of tolerance of and control by the government of Thailand. Who the refugees are, where they come from, and what the relationship between Thailand and their country of origin is, help explain Thailand's attitude. In general,
refugee policy tends to follow two basic patterns: refugees persecuted by political regimes considered to be a potential threat to the stability of Thailand and refugees from countries which seem unwilling or unable to enter into conflicts with Thailand. Examples of these two different categories may provide a better justification and understanding of the Thai government's attitude toward the Vietnamese and, subsequently, other Indochinese refugees.

The Chinese

Early settlements of the Chinese date back to the foundation of the Thai kingdom in the 13th century (10). Gradually, these migrants were assimilated to the Thai society through marriage, economic and political associations of the Chinese business community and the Thai elite class. However, the period after World War II witnessed severe limitations imposed on Chinese education and immigration, in addition to the severance of political ties with Communist China in 1949. Early attempts at controlling or eliminating Chinese influence upon Thai politics was the passage of Thailand's first Nationality Act of 1913 which stipulated that any person born within the confines of the Thai kingdom was a Thai citizen, regardless of the nationality of the person's parents (11). With the exception of the 1953-56 policy which classified most locally born Chinese as aliens, the Nationality Act of 1956 reaffirmed the original act (12). However, the possession of Thai nationality does not provide the person with all the rights of citizenship, particularly the rights of voting or running for public
office (13). But the locally born Chinese who have been conferred Thai nationality and whose parents are aliens have the privileges of voting under the condition that they have received Thai education through the tenth-grade level and served in the Thai Armed Forces. Individuals who meet these requirements are eligible to run for political office (14). The growing mutual interests between the Thai elite class and the Chinese community leaders have improved the political relationship between the Thai and Chinese. Thus, the economic and social ties with the Thai leaders enable these Chinese to secure modifications of Thai laws to protect the Chinese (15). However, it should be noted that these Chinese attempt to secure policy changes within the status quo and not, normally, the fundamental policy.

A number of political events are said to have contributed to the assimilation of the Chinese to Thai influence: the attenuation of homeland ties through the adoption of an annual quota of 200 Chinese immigrants; the refusal to grant diplomatic recognition of Communist China by the Thai government; the political unpopularity of public pro-Communist opinions, which could provoke stringent regulations unfavorable to the Chinese economic position; and the tendency of a larger number of locally-born Chinese to share common interests with the Thai (16). As far as the association with Communist China is concerned, pro-Communist influence achieved predominance in several major Chinese associations and labor unions during the early 1950s. Besides, pro-Communist tendencies were also obvious in the Chinese schools and newspapers (17). The government of Thailand responded by
promulgating the Un-Thai Activities Act of 1952 (18). This policy was maintained at a high tempo until 1954. The Bandung Conference of 1955, which shed a more favorable light on China, managed to relax many of Thailand's restrictions on the local Chinese and to encourage a policy of assimilation (19). However, most of the anti-Communist laws remain in effect. It was not too long after the Bandung Conference that Marshal Sirit seized power in 1958 that another phase of strict anti-Communist laws were launched. As a consequence, Communist groups went underground. It is reported that Communist success among the Chinese in Thailand is greater than among the Thai. Some sources claim that the Thai Communist Party is divided into the Thai and Chinese constituents because of the former's tendency to reject Chinese ideological leadership (20). In summary, the nature of China's support for insurgency in Thailand is reflected in the following excerpt:

"The doctrinal statements of Lin Piao and others speak rather in terms of what they call 'People's war,' which plainly means the instigation and support of movements that can be represented as local movements, designed to subvert and overthrow existing governments and replace them as regimes responsive to Peking's will. This is what we are seeing today in Thailand in the form of a so-called 'Thai Patriotic Front' established and reported from mainland China. This is the form of Communist tactic that must be met (21)."

While the threat of Communist insurgency exists among the Chinese in Thailand, other groups within the Chinese community provide an important source of support for the Nationalists. They not only engineered the successful seizure of political power in China in 1911, but also substantially assisted the Kuomintang in its struggle against
Japanese invasion during World War II (22). In the more recent periods, the support of overseas Chinese communities has nurtured Nationalist hopes for a return to power in mainland China. From this vantage point, the Nationalists become the protectors of traditional Chinese culture in order to enhance their influence among older generations of overseas Chinese. By the same token, educational facilities in Taiwan have attracted young Chinese from overseas (23). However, it seems difficult to assess the extent to which allegiance exists among the Chinese minorities in Thailand toward either Chinese governments. While the government of Thailand allows a limited number of pro-Nationalist political activities, the comprehensive Thai proscriptions against overt pro-Peking opinions and activities render the assessment of pro-Communist sentiment more complicated. On the other hand, some sources report that the newly emerging leadership of Chinese community in Thailand is increasingly taking a position of political neutrality. Some considerations lie in the fact that the wealthy Chinese elites have assured their own position and seem unlikely to stand to loose it by advancing matters determined by the Thai government to be detrimental to national security (24).

The Indians

The Indian minority groups in Thailand represent an extremely small percentage of the country's population. They live in or are scattered in the vicinity of Bangkok, Songkhla, Phuket, Chiang Mai, Khon Kaen, and Nakhon Ratchasima (25). They are considered transient
people who attempt to maintain their religion and traditional norms and, therefore, are unlikely to assimilate with the Thai. Most of them are Hindu and the early generations have migrated to Thailand more than a century ago. The more recent arrivals are refugees from Burma but they have not yet been completely assimilated into the general Indian community of Thailand.

The importance of the Indian minority groups lies in their economic influence on some sectors of the economy of Thailand (26). Next to the Chinese, the Indians constitute the second most important non-Thai economic group. In competition with the Chinese, they deal with the sale of textiles, groceries, moneylending. Traditionally, they hold jobs as chauffeurs, watchmen, taxi drivers, etc...(27)

In terms of political activities in Thailand, the Indians are said to be apolitical. However, their political involvement has been seen in their support of Indian nationalism and their country of origin, rather than struggling for political power in Thailand. When Indian independence was regained from the British, the political needs of the Indian minority groups seemed to be satisfied. The relationships between the government of Thailand and the Indian community has become friendly ever since. The Indian minority has often been praised by the Thai government for its promotion of general and trading relationship between the two peoples. In addition, the Indians have been law-abiding residents (28). However, two major problems surfaced in the 1950s. The first problem involved the protest of the Indian
Chamber of Commerce to the Thai government over alleged slurs by Radio Bangkok and other groups in the matter of Indian contributions to public charities. Secondly, the Thai policy of 1949 required the Indians to be registered as aliens. This policy triggered protests from the Indian government, but it had been pursued with some flexibilities. Nevertheless, after the deadline for registration had passed, there still were a large number of unregistered Indians in Thailand (29).

The examples illustrating the cases of the Chinese and the Indians in Thailand show some differences in the treatment of refugees or ethnic minorities by the Thai government. Cited earlier in this chapter, the case of the Vietnamese and other Indochinese refugees reflects a much higher degree of governmental control as opposed to the control exercised over the Chinese and the Indians. It appears that three major factors are held responsible for these differences: the distance separating Thailand from the country of origin, the eventual threat that the minority groups could create to endanger national security, and the political relationship between the governments of Thailand and the country of origin. In respective order of control, the Thai government is much more cautious in handling the Indochinese refugees because of the potential threat from Indochinese states, Vietnam in particular, backed by Communist power. This threat is considered prominent. Evidence of subversive activities have created mistrust in the Thai government toward many Indochinese refugees. Most of all, governed by opposing political ideology, the government of
Thailand believes that an intention of Vietnam is to attack Thailand. Comparing this situation to that of the Chinese in Thailand, the same extent of threat exists in subversive matters, yet the improvement of political relationship and the distances between Thailand and China make it less likely for direct threat from China. Finally, the Indian refugees appear to be the least controlled by the government of Thailand among the three instances. Partly because of their apolitical characteristics, the Indians are considered harmless to national security, although some of the basic regulations are applied to them as refugees or aliens.

IV. **Behind Policy Outcomes**

As mentioned in the preceding section, policy is the outcome of the interaction between several factors. With respect to the Indochinese refugee policy, the interacting factors can be grouped as follows: Thailand's considerations, the roles of friendly nations, and the roles of international organizations. While the first group can be perceived as giving the raison d'être to such policy, the other two groups represent the means whereby such policy could or could not be realized, providing at the same time both support and limitation.

Thailand's considerations involve in the first place politics and the military. Whereas Thai politicians find it necessary to give temporary refuge in the name of humanitarianism, they are also aware that involvement in refugee matters may result in social problems and
negative political consequences both vis-a-vis the Thai people and the
governments of Indochinese states since Thailand is helping those they
have persecuted. The military, on the other hand, tends to view the
situation from the strategic standpoint and shows great concern about
national security and the means whereby it can be preserved. The
military already has to deal with Communist subversion and sabotage in
quite a few areas, especially in the Northeast and the South.
Accepting a large number of refugees requires military personnel and
equipment to be drawn from other areas — not to mention the costs that
will follow. Since several Indochinese high ranking governmental
officials had sought political asylum in Thailand where they were put
in Centres for Displaced Persons established along the border, it is
therefore conceivable to the Thai government that forces from
Indochinese states might eventually violate the sovereignty of Thailand
in order to recapture these important personalities (30). Secondly,
the risk of Communist infiltration is another drawback. Because of the
limited number of personnel available for assisting the displaced
persons' affairs, these latter are consequently allowed to leave the
camps for personal business. This, therefore, provides an opportunity
for enemy agents to get in touch with them at any time outside the
camps (31). Thirdly, subversive activities have been going on. The
Thai police in the Northeast have arrested several agents who had
slipped into refugee camps and spread propaganda against the Thai
national interest. It is confirmed that an agent network connects all
the camps throughout the nation (32). In retrospect, evidence has
revealed that a number of Vietnamese refugees have undertaken
clandestine activities in violation of the Thai government's refugee policy. For example, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a Vietnamese nationalist organization, the Vietnam Restoration Association, used Thailand as a staging source to send young Vietnamese to China and Japan for revolutionary training (33). More recent clandestine organizations of Vietnamese refugees in Thailand were uncovered by the Thai authorities, especially during the 1960s under stricter control imposed by Phibun Songkhram administration. Clandestine schools have also existed under the Lao Dong organization: evening classes are given to Vietnamese children to learn the language, history and traditions of Vietnam (34). The promotion of Communist ideology which is against the Thai national ideology and is considered a threat to the national security has been prevalent. They have also sent financial contributions to North Vietnam in the support of this latter's invasion in neighbouring countries --including Thailand in their initial phase of insurgency support. In this connection, paramilitary training has been provided to young Vietnamese males in Mukdaharn (35). "Free Vietnamese" who do not believe in Communist ideology and the Thais who have attempted to obstruct their clandestine activities have been threatened or harmed, in addition to using the Vietnamese refugees and old settlers as a sources of funds, material supplies, and recruits (36). Besides financially and materially supporting Communist guerrilla warfare in Thailand, they have undertaken subversive activities at different air bases and at some important strategic locations. In order to acquire Thai nationality so that they can freely exercise clandestine
activities, they have either given their children for adoption by Thai parents, changed their domicile with the cooperation of some Thai authorities through bribery, taken up deceased persons' names or had their female relatives married to Thai people (37).

On the other hand, as far as Thailand’s foreign relations are concerned, granting assistance to these political refugees is perceived by the Indochinese governments as an undue interference with their domestic affairs. And yet, if Thailand denies assistance, she will be blamed by most free world nations for her lack of humanitarian concern. Thailand did not cause the Indochinese Wars, has nothing to gain from them, and yet she is put in a double-bind situation in which there are few alternatives.

The morale of her people has been affected as well. Thailand is not in war but circumstances appear frightening especially to the rural people living in border areas. It should be pointed out that over 200,000 Thai peasants have been uprooted because of border conflicts caused by the plight of refugees (38). They had to abandon their properties and be resettled in safer areas. Besides, the rural poor who have to lead a very tough life find themselves disadvantaged and become discontented when they see the refugees being provided food and shelter in return of nothing. From their standpoint, the refugees are better taken care of by the Thai government than they can be. Moreover, a large number of peasants do not own lands on which they cultivate and have been denied access to public lands and national
forests. But the Thai government, upon the urging of UNHCR, has been using parts of both public lands and national forests in the establishment of refugee camps. This has resulted in both discontentment and loss of credibility with the people, thereby weakening national unity. By the same token, the limitation of the budget has led to a double duty imposed on the local-level civil servants. Besides serving the population, they have to handle refugee work which, most of the time, requires immediate action. Public service, therefore, is delayed, if not unavailable, to the Thai rural.

In formulating her policy, Thailand also has to consider the reallocation of resources and financial support which pose a burden on the Thai government. With a population of forty-eight million, ten million of them are living under the poverty line (39). In such conditions, Thailand has to spare US$ 38 million per year in handling refugee problems. This means that although over the last ten years Thailand has had an annual increase of six to seven percent in economic development, a better credit rating than most other Southeast Asian countries, greater foreign investments, and in 1983 had accommodated 2.2 million tourists (40), she cannot use the entire benefit for further economic development and assistance to her own people.

The roles of friendly nations in helping alleviate Thailand’s refugee problem are very important. These nations can both provide financial and material support, and allow refugees to be resettled within their territory. Some nations, namely the United States,
France, etc... found themselves obligated to share the massive refugee burden partly because of their involvements in Indochinese Wars. By contrast, other nations such as Japan, Switzerland, Denmark, Norway, etc... have accepted a number of refugees either out of humanitarian or political considerations. However, it should be noted that the United States has been the largest recipient of refugees and the largest contributing nation. On the other hand, France has accepted approximately half of the total Indochinese refugees admitted to the United States, no record had yet indicated any France's financial contribution as of 1978 (41), except material and equipment contributions. Through the call for humanity from the Thai government and the efforts of UNHCR, 102,564 Indochinese displaced persons were resettled in third countries in 1981 (42). Such cooperative response is required to solve the Indochinese refugee problem. However, the perspective became alarming when receiving countries established new selective criteria based upon immigration regulations rather than humanitarian considerations—a policy which does not suit the circumstances provided that those governments sincerely desire to assist these unfortunate people. As a consequence, the 1982 figure shows that only 33,000 Indochinese refugees were resettled in third countries (43). This represent a decrease of 70 percent. In this regard, the decline is not in compliance with the firm commitments made by the participating countries to fully cooperate in the search for a lasting solution to the Indochinese refugee problem. These commitments were made to the government of Thailand and, accordingly, it launched an open-door policy in 1979 to provide temporary refuge for the
Indochinese evacuees pending third country resettlement. To help remedy the situation, the Honolulu Conference of August 1983, attended by envoys from donor and third countries, reflected an effort to increase refugee resettlement. In this connection, steps taken by some governments, especially that of the United States, to allow some flexibility in setting up the criteria and conditions (44), have shed some light on the future of both the remaining Indochinese refugees and the governments of first countries of asylum. But despite this improvement, Thailand's outcry still persists. Refugees admitted to third countries either are the best educated or possess some professional skills. This selective process ignores the "first come, first served" system and appears unfair to those whose opportunity has been denied on this basis. Statistics show that among Indochinese refugees immigrating to Thailand prior to 1979, 61 percent of the Laotian and 72 percent of the Vietnamese refugees had received only approximately five years of formal education; 43 percent of the Laotian refugees were civil servants whereas 51 percent of the Vietnamese possessed some professional skills. On the other hand, among the 145,000 Cambodian refugees who fled to Thailand from October 1979, only 12 percent with Cambodian-Chinese ethnic background had formal education and professional skills (45). This does not mean, however, that Cambodia had less educated people than did Laos, but an explanation lies in the fact that a large number of Cambodian intellectuals were exterminated by Pol Pot. These figures, especially those of the Cambodians, indicate that the majority of these Indochinese refugees are less than qualified for third countries of
resettlement. Who are then left to Thailand to take care of? The only thing that the government of Thailand and helping agencies can do, and have been doing, is to provide these unfortunate people education and skills so that they become better equipped to qualify for third country resettlement.

Besides Thailand's own considerations and the roles of friendly nations, the roles played by international organizations, relief agencies, either with governmental or private support, have had a considerable impact on Thailand's refugee policy. These organizations can provide financial and material support, but unlike third countries of resettlement, they cannot provide resettlement space of their own. Despite this physical constraint, their political power should not be underestimated. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has proved to be very powerful in coordinating all foreign assistance contributions and in convincing some third countries to let these refugees settle down in their territory. To tackle the root cause as mentioned earlier, the UNHCR is a powerful means whereby Thailand has been calling for the withdrawal of Vietnamese forces from Kampuchea. Other agencies include UNICEF which offers material assistance and services in border camps; the World Food Programme (WFP), providing food supplies to holding centres and border camps; the International Committee for Red Cross (ICRC) for medical and communication services; the Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration (ICEM) for refugee resettlement in third countries; the Voluntary Agencies (VOLAGS), for humanitarian and relief assistance
involving sixty voluntary agencies (46). But the only group that immediately responded to the Kampuchean crisis of 1979 was composed of international private voluntary organizations, among them were OXFAM (47), the International Rescue Committee (IRC), and the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) (48). The advantage that these private organizations have over foreign governments or even the United Nations lies in their independent status that allows them a variety of approaches to avoid political constraints. This explains how important they become in politically delicate situations.

Obviously, there is more than one set of factors upon which the decision to formulate policy is based. The complex interaction among various factors helps explain why a certain policy is formulated and geared in a certain direction. Thus, Thailand's open-door policy of 1979 was based on these three sets of factors. How effective that policy has been depends on the standpoint from which the situation is viewed. In terms of humanitarian considerations, it has either saved the lives or alleviated human suffering for several hundred thousand of victims. But how long this policy will continue to be implemented merely depends on the degree of tolerance of its effects. If bad consequences result and the international attention is drawn to remedy the situation, Thailand will hardly find a conceivable excuse to change her policy. What she needs is not only firm commitments but also sufficient support to materialize those commitments.
Chapter III: Footnotes

1. A briefing of the Thai policy toward the Vietnamese refugees by H.E. Asa Boonyapratuang, former Deputy Director of the International Organization, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bangkok.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid. The same policy is still in use as of June 1984 and has been confirmed by Sawanit Kongsiri of the Thai Foreign Ministry.

6. "The Unfair Burden: Displaced Persons from Indochina", (Bangkok: Ministry of Interior, 1978), p.34 and Table 2-C


8. Ibid.

9. I posed these questions to Kongsiri and such was the answer given to me.


12. Ibid., p.173

13. Ibid., p.177


15. Ibid., p.243


22. Minority Groups in Thailand, op.cit., p.198

23. Ibid.


27. Ibid., p.33


29. Ibid.


31. Ibid., p.19

32. Ibid.


34. Ibid., p.98

35. Ibid., p.106
36. Ibid., pp.41-42


40. Ibid. Note that Thailand expected 2.4 million tourists in 1983, but the difference rather reflects world-wide economic recession.

41. "The Unfair Burden", op. cit., pp.31-32 and Table 1-C

42. Sqd. Ldr. Prasong Soonsiri, Speech delivered at the 34th Session of the UNHCR’s Executive Committee in Geneva. For more information concerning the work of the UNHCR, see Mandate to Protect and Assist the Refugees: 20 Years of Service in the Cause of Refugees, 1951-1971, (Lausanne, Editions Rencontre, 1971); Demetrios G. Papademetriou and Mark J. Miller, 67The Unavoidable Issue: U.S. Immigration Policy in the 1980s, (Philadelphia: Institute of the Study of the Human Issues, Inc., 1983)

43. Ibid.

44. Ibid.

45. Pornchai Busayakul, symposium on refugees, Thailand, December 1979


47. OXFAM is an international organization established in England and has an American affiliate called Oxfam-America.

Chapter IV

Understanding Thai Attitudes toward the Indochinese

History shows that the Thai people were originally a minority ethnic group living in Nanchoo, Yunnan, located in the Southwestern region of China. Later on, they migrated Southward and settled down among the Indianized Khmers, Mons, and Burmans (1). When the Thai kingdom of the Ayuthaya era was founded in 1350, it became apparent that the Thai had borrowed their political system and civilization from Cambodia. The written Thai language and part of the vocabulary were also derived from those of Cambodia. The Thai people also adopted judicial style and Theravada Buddhism from the Mons and the Burmans (2). The Thais, having assimilated this cultural heritage, created their own unique civilization. To these fundamental characteristics were added the influences of the West and the immigration of Chinese evacuees (3). Despite this background, the Thai still claim their uniqueness and homogeneity. While they consider racial differences of little importance in determining a person’s behavior, superiority, or inferiority, they do make a distinction between different groups based on ethnic background (4) for each ethnic group usually holds a particular position in the society. For instance, most of the Thais are either peasants or governmental employees, whereas the Chinese minority members are most of the times found in business. From this standpoint, it could be argued that the Thais display different attitudes toward different ethnic groups depending on their social status which is in turn determined by the profession. Variation in attitudes also applies to foreigners and foreign nations. Thus, it is deemed necessary and important to understand the Thais' attitudes
toward each and every Indochinese state so that this understanding can provide some insight about the attitudes toward Indochinese refugees.

I. General Attitudes

Ironically, most of the minority groups have been assigned an epithet by the Thais: fearful Chinese, beautiful Mon women, lazy Laotians, persevering Vietnamese, timid Karen, etc. Although informal, these epithets reflect the Thai people's attitudes toward each ethnic group. However, these attitudes seem to be directed to a group as a whole, and some flexibilities are allowed on a more personal basis. At the same time, it should be noted that the type of society found in Thailand does allow a great deal of mobility as far as class structure is concerned. This mobility is primarily realized through wealth and power, i.e., governmental position. Money or other forms of wealth are considered as the most crucial and desirable goal of life (5). Thus, members of minority groups can be accepted in the high society: the wealthy Chinese businessmen can illustrate this mobility. Many of them are now occupying important positions and some others have either direct or indirect influence on the Thai government. Some achieve this status through donations to royally sponsored charities or the police department. As a consequence, they may receive awards and decorations --for which many Thai civil servants can spend their whole life serving the government and not be able to obtain one. This mobility explains the feasibility of cultural assimilation as well as social integration and acceptance for members of minority groups. Thus, the educated and
the wealthy minorities are regarded differently from other minorities whose lack of struggle or opportunity prevent them from entering the mainstream of the Thai society. The Karen, for example, have retained a distinct ethnic identity (6), the majority of whom have not acquired either the Thai language or Buddhism (7). This lack of education prevents them from holding a decent job and thereby keeps them in the lower socio-economic class. It is therefore conceivable that the Karen's complete assimilation into the Thai society is unlikely. Besides personality considerations, physical traits do not seem to be a major obstacle for social acceptance since most of these ethnic groups possess some of the Asian features that can also be found among the Thais.

The Thai people, on the other hand, tend to show a different attitude toward foreigners living in Thailand as opposed to ethnic or alien minorities. Foreigners from Western countries seem to be accorded the highest priority among foreigners from other parts of the world. These Westerners are regarded with respect, and sometimes fear, for they represent the symbol of wealth, intelligence, and technologically more advanced civilization. On the other hand, the presence of Chinese or Japanese is perceived as an attempt to either abuse or control the Thai economy. However, Chinese foreigners are often related to Chinese residents in Thailand or sometimes are viewed as having the same origin, and are therefore welcomed by these people.
As far as neighbouring countries are concerned, it should be admitted that the Thai people have a tendency to look down upon them to a certain degree. The reasons behind this attitude are of historical, political, and economic nature. From the historical perspective, Thailand was involved in wars with Burma, Cambodia, and Laos (8), and in conflicts concerning subversion or insurgency with Malaysia. Furthermore, Thailand had been in politically sensitive conflict with Cambodia in the cases of Thailand's secession of Battambong and Siemreap (9), and the Temple of Phreah Vihear (10). Political involvements with Vietnam mainly concern Vietnamese refugees in Thailand and the direct and indirect effects of Vietnamese invasion of neighbouring countries. However, whether the Thais had succeeded or not in all these conflict cases does not explain their pride over their neighbours who ended up losing their independence to colonial powers. Rather, it is the final outcomes that have to be taken into consideration. Unlike neighbouring countries, the Thais have managed to preserve their sovereignty. The pride seems also to be translated in the economic development that has put Thailand ahead of many of her neighbours.

II. Attitudes toward the Cambodian

The terms "Khmer" and "Cambodian" have been used interchangeably to designate the people of Cambodia or Kampuchea. However, a difference does exist between the two terms. Whereas the term "Khmer" is used to designate both the ancient population of the Khmer Empire
and their descendants, and to indicate an ethnic identification, the term "Cambodian" refers to the citizens of Cambodia and therefore includes other ethnic groups living in the same country (11). But to the Thai people these terms are used interchangeably without differentiation. This implies that attitudes toward Khmer minorities in Thailand is somewhat similar to the attitudes toward Cambodian nationals. The size of Khmer minority groups residing in Thailand vary considerably according to different estimates made at different periods. Early sources reported estimates ranging from 160,000 to 400,000 (12). However, some more recent estimates range from 300,000 to 400,000 (13).

As can be expected, most of the Khmer live in the Northeastern and Southeastern provinces of Thailand along the Thai-Cambodian border. The Khmer used to inhabit most of the Thai Northeastern region, and the area around Ubon and Khorat once belonged to Cambodia (14). The Khmer settlements in the provinces of Ubon, Sisaket, Surin, Buriram, and Khorat, represent earlier extension of the Khmer Empire and a more ancient population stratum than that of the Thai people (15). The same background can be applied to the Khmer inhabiting Prachin Buri, Chantaburi, and Trat (16). Moreover, Khmer villages are also scattered in Rayong, Chon Buri, Chachoengsao, and Roi Et (17). Besides these groups of descendants of the original inhabitants, Khmer ethnic groups are also found in Raj Buri, Kanchanaburi, Chachoengsao, Chon Buri, and Bangkok (18). However, these groups are descendants of Khmer prisoners of war from the fourteenth century (19).
Since the majority of the Khmer minority live in rural areas, it becomes understandable that their economy is largely based upon agriculture, especially rice cultivation. High agricultural productivity is partly the function of appropriate amount of rain which is unfortunately unpredictable. Agriculture produces low incomes and thereby assigns a large number of Khmer ethnics to the lower socio-economic class in Thailand. Efforts by the Thai government to assist these people through education and vocational training produce very slow progress (20). One explanation lies in the belief that the Khmer prefer to work as little as possible so long that they can satisfy their needs (21). Another factor reveals the Khmer's negative attitude toward Thai education (22) which can partly be explained by their conservatism in the concept of morality and in dealing with outsiders (23). Other factors responsible for this poverty include inadequate irrigation facilities, dependence on a single agricultural product, soil exhaustion, and lack of education (24).

As far as political organization is concerned, the formal relationship between the Khmer villagers and the government of Thailand remains largely unknown (25). According to a survey, this relationship cannot be accurately assessed because a great number of Khmer villagers could not communicate in Thai. Moreover, the absence of political opinion or involvement could be attributed to the isolation of the villages (26). Nevertheless, during the period after World War II, a certain number of Khmer groups residing in the Eastern provinces near Cambodian border showed the desire to join with their kinsmen in
Cambodia, implying the search for the foundation of a natural Cambodian state. However, these groups have not represented a serious problem to the Thai government up until the present time (27).

The political relationship between Thailand and Cambodia had alternated between that of a friendship and aggression depending on the circumstances, pressures, time period, and motivation of each party. The Ankor period, which lasted from 802-1432 A.D., marked the time of greatness of Cambodia (28). King Jayavarman II reunited the ancient Chen-La empire, the northernmost part bordering Yunnan, the entire present-day Laotian territory, and a large part of the present-day Thailand (29). However, the decline started after the death of Jayavarman VII in 1219 (30) and the kingdom suffered under a series of local crises and foreign invasions by both Thailand and Vietnam beginning around the mid thirteenth century (31). Facing factional feuding on the domestic scene, the last important Cambodian leader Jayavarman VIII (1243-95) was unable to mount powerful and effective resistance to Thai invasions (33). Ankor Wat was seized by the Thai army in 1353; later on it was recaptured by the Cambodian. Relations between Thailand and Cambodia developed into a series of wars that lasted for centuries (34). In 1430-31, Ankor Wat became once more under Thailand's possession and this event profoundly marked the end of the grandiose Khmer era (35). From 1432 to 1864, Cambodia fought against Thai and Vietnamese aggression, and subsequently European powers. While this period is known as "a time for independence for Cambodia", reality rather unveiled a transitional period into a French
protectorate (36). Thus, for many centuries, Thailand had claimed suzerainty over Cambodia through forceful means, and in 1603 she succeeded in installing a Cambodia king entirely under her domination (37). Cambodia initially sought assistance from Spain and Portugal, but the latter took an ineffectual approach. Ang Duong, put on the Cambodian throne by Thailand and Vietnam in 1846, turned to France rather than Great Britain whose policy towards Southeast Asia seemed more aggressive (38). The Franco-Cambodian treaty was signed in 1863. Under this treaty, France—who was already fighting against Vietnam—was given exclusive control of Cambodian foreign affairs and the right to protect Cambodia both against external hostile powers and internal enmity (39). During the French protectorate period from 1864 to 1949, both Thailand and Vietnam were eliminated as political problems. Moreover, Cambodia benefited from France's advocacy of her claims against the government of Thailand for restitution of the provinces of Siemreap where Ankor Wat is located, and Battambang. Cambodia's claims were satisfied in 1904 (40). The long periods of the Thai occupation of Cambodian territory had not been deeply resented by the Cambodian. The inhabitants of those areas were well treated under the Thai domination during World War II, and for this reason, the incident tended to be viewed as one between the French and the Thai, overlooking Cambodian involvement. However, the relation between Thailand and Cambodia during the post-French protectorate period was characterized by political tensions. First, the Thai felt that Sihanouk's neutralist policy would deprive them of an anti-Communist front line. Thailand seemed to resent Cambodia's recognition of China whereas she was a
member of the Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO). Secondly, the Thai occupation of Phreak Vihear—a Cambodian Buddhist temple—in 1953 resulted in the former being ejected by Cambodian troops and Thailand's retaliation by closing the border and blockading Cambodia (41). As time passed, tensions became eased. As history has suggested, the Thai-Cambodian relationship is also affected by external political factors. At the present time, Thailand is supporting Sihanouk in his call for the withdrawal of Vietnamese forces from Cambodia.

III. Attitudes toward the Laotian

The Laotian people living in Thailand represent a special case differing from that of the Khmer ethnics or Vietnamese aliens. The Laotians can be classified into two major categories: native ethnic groups and illegal immigrants or refugees.

Ethnic background indicates that the Thai are composed of regional subgroups, namely Central Thai composing of approximately ten million; Thai or Lao Yuan, two million; Thai Khorat, one million; and Thai or Lao of the Northeast, five million (42). On the one hand, the distinction between groups became blurring because of physical mobility, educational system, and the efforts to strengthen national unity by the Thai government. On the other hand, an estimate made in 1970 reported that there were about ten million Laotians in Thailand, which represented approximately one-third of the entire Thai population at
that time. Many of these Laotians were forcibly abducted in feudal eras. The North and Northeast were formerly Laotian territory, but they were seized by the Thais in feudal eras (43). Prior to 1975, the political border was no barrier to constant movement for the Laotians; many of them had both Thai and Laotian nationalities at the same time. For these reasons, the Lao ethnic groups residing in the North and Northeast have come to refer to themselves as Thais and no longer Laotians (44). It could, therefore, be concluded that the Laotians of this category have seemingly been assimilated into the Thai culture.

In comparison, they are not distinctively referred to as either native ethnic minority like the Khmer, nor as alien ethnic group like the Vietnamese. These two groups have retained more of their ethnic characteristics. Another factor that has facilitated this assimilation stems from the fact that a high degree of similarity can be found in the culture and tradition of both Thailand and Laos. Likewise, the national religion of both countries is traditionally Theravada Buddhism. However, it should be noted that in Laos, after the Communist triumph in 1975, Theravada Buddhism has lost a great many of its features. Marxist ideology has forced the Laotian Buddhism to incline toward directions which no longer correspond to those of the traditional Theravada Buddhism. Rather, little by little the direction evolves toward a form of Mahayana Buddhism (45). Furthermore, the Laotian and the Thai languages, both in their written and spoken aspects, have a high degree of resemblance. Generally speaking, there are four dialects of the languages of the Tai family: the core Thai or the Central Thai, the Thai-Lao or the Northeastern Thai, the Northern
Thai and the Southern Thai (46). For this reason, the Laotian language spoken in the northern and northeastern Thailand is not called "Lao language", but is rather referred to as the "Isan dialect" (47). The dialects of the four regional components are mutually intelligible but with difficulty (48). The following quotation helps clarify the situation: "If you understand the Thai language you get the impression in Vientiane (the official capital of Laos) that you are in a Thai town. The languages are similar, but the differences are easily noticed." (49) However, Central Thai is the standard language employed in official communications and taught in schools. It also appears that dialect differences are often a cause of irritation marking the relations between the native standard Thai speakers and persons from other regions. If people from other regions migrate to Bangkok and speak their own dialect, they tend to be looked down upon by Central Thai. Furthermore, if such people fail to speak standard Thai with sufficient fluency and a correct accent, they may be treated with contempt (50). In spite of social discrimination, the Thai government has been of the opinion that ethnic Thai other than those whose origin are from the central region are granted all the rights, privileges, and opportunities accorded to Thai-ness. However, there has been the tendency of the Thai government to neglect the North and Northeast. Attention has been turned to people living in those areas when the growing popularity of the left-wing governments in neighbouring countries and local discontent led the Thai government to launch a combined policy of aid and repression. Seemingly more neglected than the Northern Thai until the mid 1960s were the Thai-Lao. At various
times in history, the poor agricultural resources of the Northeast, corrupt administration, neglect, and heavy taxation, have imposed a greater burden on the Thai-Lao than on other Thai peasants (51). It could also be argued that political turmoil in Vietnam and Laos coupled with the manifestations of peasant discontent led to the need of the Thai government to undertake program of community and agricultural development in conjunction with counter-insurgency policy launched in 1960s and remained in force in early 1980 (52).

On the other hand, since the Laotians residing in Thailand are seemingly considered Thais, their social status is similar to that of the Thais who found themselves under the same conditions. In this light, Laotians in the rural areas of the North and Northeast are likely to be cultivators and are treated in the same manner as their Thai counterparts. Ethnic background is therefore not the criterion for their job opportunities or social standings. Rather, opportunities are open to them as to the Thais of the same background, i.e., the same level of education or financial support. Some Thai high ranking governmental officials are said to have Laotian ethnic background, among whom the late Field Marshal Sirit Thanarat, who was born in Mukdaharn, Nakhon Phanom, was said to be related to general Phoumi Nosavan, former Laos's Defense Minister of the 1960s.

Early historical accounts, particularly regarding political relationships between Thailand and Laos, seem to be limited. Laotian history is learned from legend rather than from fact (53). The Lao
kingdom of Lan Xang (Land of a Million Elephants) was founded in 1353 by Fa Ngoun. His kingdom managed to dominate parts of Yunnan, the southern Shan States, the Vietnamese and Cambodian plateaus, and northeastern Thailand, by the seventeenth century. This period marked Laos's political apex. For the following period of two centuries, Lan Xang declined slowly. The country was exhausted by wars, invasions and conquests of its territory by neighbouring nations, and moreover, the internal division of the kingdom into four sections weakened the unity of the Laos: Luang Prabang, Vientiane, Xieng Khouang, and Champassak (54). In 1885, the Siamese army marched into Xieng Khouang and Houa Phans under the pretext of suppressing the Chinese bandits menacing in regions predominantly inhabited by Thai ethnic groups. However, their facade was unveiled when they seized the viceroy of Luang Prabang and brought him to Bangkok as hostage (55). The implication of this event explained French intervention and Laos's acceptance of French protectorate. Later on in 1893, the French blockaded Bangkok by naval and military forces in order to gain formal accession of all Thai claims in Laos. The first Franco-Siamese treaty established the Mekong boundary between Thailand and Laos, thereby separating both Luang Prabang and Champassak into two sections. In 1904 and 1905 under new treaties, Thailand had to cede the west bank of Luang Prabang and Bassac (56). However, around 1942 Japan—who was displaying her hegemony over Southeast Asian countries—allowed her ally Thailand to seize those sections of Luang Prabang and Champassak back from the French. This incident did not provoke much Laos's resentment toward either the Thai or the Japanese, but it did lower French prestige. The
Vichy government was finally ousted in 1945 (57). From that time on, Laos's foreign relations with Thailand improved because the latter could provide its best overland connections and was the logical pathway of military assistance should it be required. Thai economic influence upon landlocked Laos had been increasing. From the political standpoint, the Thai military had given support to the Lao government for anti-Communist activities in the period before 1975. A number of Laotian military were trained in Thailand by Thai and American military personnel. In 1971, some tribal minority Thais were enlisted in the Royal Lao Army. In retrospect, American and Thai military advisors were involved in Laos' strategic move by setting a defence line against neutralist and Prathet Lao forces in Xieng Khouang in 1961 (58). On the other hand, the importance of Laos to Thailand reflected in the former's being a buffer state in the event of serious crisis with Communist China.

IV. Attitudes toward the Vietnamese

Much of the content of this section has already been discussed in detail in Chapters II and III. In order to avoid unnecessary repetition, this section shall embark on the overview of occupations and social standings of the Vietnamese in Thailand. The origin of these people differs from that of the Khmer or the Laotian on the grounds that most of them have migrated into Thailand as refugees or illegal immigrants, and their roles are thereby restricted by the Thai government's policy regarding refugees. At the same time it should be
noted that this condition can be only imposed upon the more recent
influx of Vietnamese refugees, as opposed to the early Vietnamese who
entered Thailand as far back as a century and a half before World War
II. The descendants of this early generation have more or less been
assimilated into the Thai culture and have acquired the Thai
nationality at a time when no immigration regulations were yet
established. The economic activities of the Yuan Cao involve various
fishing, agricultural, and artisan trades (59). The Vietnamese living
in Chanthaburi Province are mainly fishermen (60). The Vietnamese
farmers have the tendency to cultivate rice and fruit trees. Most of
the Vietnamese in Bangkok run small commercial enterprises, involving
photographic shops, and tailoring and cleaning businesses (61).

In 1951, the Thai government formulated the rules concerning the
rights of the Vietnamese refugees to live, work, and travel about in
the Thai kingdom. This policy stipulates that:

1. The Vietnamese refugee population is divided into groups
   of ten families. With each group, a Thai policeman is
   assigned to live as "headman" in order to closely supervise
   their activities.

2. No refugee is allowed to leave the town or village to
   which he is officially assigned for a period longer than
   twenty-four hours, unless he has obtained a written
   permission from the Thai authorities.

3. The refugee cannot change his residence unless prior
   permission is obtained.

4. The head of the family must report to the police each
   and every time a person from outside the province desires to
   get in touch with a member of his family. The headman must
   check that the visit is about the refugee's honest living.
   If politics are involved, he must report to the Police
   Special Branch.
5. If a well-behaved refugee wishes to work outside his restricted areas, the permission may be granted by an unanimous agreement of the authorities." (62)

Governed under these rules, the status of the Vietnamese refugees is very limited. Except for those who have acquired Thai nationality, they hold either legal alien or refugee status. From this point of view, social mobility or assimilation appear to be very unlikely, if not impossible. The rationale behind this seems to stem from the fact that these people are simply not wanted. By the same token, the 1978 rules concerning the alien's rights to work restrict their job opportunities into 27 categories which includes semi-skilled and skilled workers (Vietnamese tailors are not allowed to make woman's dress), farmers, small retail merchants (except the sales of products that are considered military equipment or could be used in warfare) (63). Thus, as a result of the Thai government's restrictions, the Vietnamese minorities live in small communities and are, in general, not integrated into the society at large, but remain in separate sections.

Little is known about the historical development of the political relationship between Thailand and Vietnam in the ancient times, as could be traced those between Thailand and Cambodia or Laos. This relative lack of contact can be partly explained by geographic conditions. Since the two nations do not share the same border, direct contact or incident that could lead to political involvement seemed to be limited. When disputes occurred, it was rather about the contest
over a land of common interests, i.e., Cambodia around 1623 (64), or
the launching of wars with Burma and Laos. From the fourteenth through
the late seventeenth centuries, the lack of contact between Thailand
and Vietnam was due not only to the Annamite mountain barrier, but also
to the emergence of the buffer kingdom of Lan Xang (65). However,
direct rivalry over Cambodia started in the seventeenth century, when
both Thailand and Vietnam followed their expansionist policy. The
rivalry was actually caused by Cambodia attempting to play her more
powerful neighbors off against one another (66) —although sometimes
feasible, this strategy led Cambodia to intermittently serve as a
battle ground between the two countries. To assert political control
over Cambodia in order to blockade the rival country's territorial
expansion, both Thailand and Vietnam adopted the policy of military
occupation and the enthronement of a puppet Cambodian king (67). Later
on in the late nineteenth century, the Thai King Chakri and the
Vietnamese Prince Nguyen Phuoc Anh improved relations between the two
kingdoms during their recovery period after the Tai-Son rebellion of
1774 that affected and weakened both countries. Prince Anh took refuge
in Thailand from 1785 to 1787, bringing the first large influx of
Vietnamese refugees to Bangkok. He gave his sister to King Chakri in
marriage, and fought against the Burmese while in exile in Thailand
(68). Nevertheless, rivalry over Cambodia asserted itself once again
as one of the principal characteristics in the relationship between
Thailand and Vietnam during the early years of the nineteenth century.
Vietnam's attempt to incorporate Cambodia into its territory, and the
enforcement of a harsh policy of assimilation resulted in Cambodia's
revolt and demand for Thailand's intervention and support. As a consequence, a war broke out between Thailand and Vietnam, and lasted for four years. When 1845 came to its end, so did the war: a treaty was signed by Thailand, Vietnam and Cambodia (69). Both Thai and Vietnamese expansionism was interrupted by a century of French domination.

Thailand's attitudes toward Vietnam shifted when the latter became divided into North and South Vietnam. She was now dealing with two states governed by opposing political regimes; a friendly relation toward one of them tended to provoke resentment in the other. As far as North Vietnam (The Democratic Republic of Vietnam) was concerned, Thailand allowed the Viet Minh to establish an information center in Bangkok 1946 (70). The rationale behind this policy stemmed from Thailand's attempt to make Bangkok the principal center for political factions working toward blockading the restoration of French domination over Indochina (71). It should also be noted that Ho Chi Minh lived among Vietnamese in Northeastern Thailand in 1929. He then founded the Overseas Vietnamese Association in Thailand and Laos for the Salvation of the Fatherland (72). However, during the period after World War II, the Viet Minh information office proved to be the center of Vietnamese Communist activities in Thailand. For this reason, the Thai government demanded that the Viet Minh close their office in 1950. Yet, prior to the passage of Thailand's second Anti-Communist Act of 1952, the Viet Minh in Thailand went underground. At the same time, the Viet Minh organization was transformed into a branch of the Lao Dong Party of
North Vietnam. In this conjunction, a central committee was created to supervise the activities of provincial and district subcommittees governing the Vietnamese in Northeastern Thailand (73). Some reliable sources reported that the Lao Dong organization in Thailand had limited contact with the Thai or Chinese Communist in the country, but was rather concerned with the Vietnamese communities (74). The central committee reported directly to Hanoi until 1962 when diplomatic relations were established between North Vietnam and Laos, allowing the former to open an embassy in Vientiane. From the Thai government standpoint, the embassy was believed to be the center for contact between North Vietnam and its agents in Thailand (75).

On the other hand, for over two decades following World War II South Vietnam’s policy sometimes irritated the Thai government. It appeared that Saigon’s concern about Vietnamese refugees in Thailand stemmed from its attempt to obstruct a Thai-North Vietnamese agreement that would increase Hanoi’s prestige and influence over the refugees. No significant actions were taken by the South Vietnam government to help alleviate the refugee problem except the acceptance of a few hundred of refugees (76), and to urge to the Thai government that resident alien status be given to the obedient Vietnamese (77). Meanwhile, the Vietnamese conflict developed into a major international war. The danger of its expanding scope to cover proximate countries seemed acute. This situation, in turn, rendered the remaining refugees more precarious. At this point, North Vietnamese assistance to Northeastern Thai dissidents and Thailand’s support of American
military operations led North Vietnam and Thailand close to a de facto state of war (78). In this connection, Hanoi publicized the establishment of the two Communist front groups, the Thai Independence Movement in November 1964 and the Patriotic Front of Thailand in January 1965 (79). As tensions between the two countries mounted, Thailand felt the necessity to halt Communist threat in South Vietnam before it reached her territory. To this end, the Thai government announced in early 1967 that several thousand Thai volunteers would be sent to South Vietnam for combat duty (80). This resulted in an improvement of the relationship between Thailand and South Vietnam, yet there were no further solutions from the latter concerning refugee problem since South Vietnam's own existence was at stake.

The implications of political relationships between the governments of Thailand, North and South Vietnams, on the issue of Vietnamese refugees are described in Chapters II and III. It could be briefly concluded that the refugees are tightly knit organizations with Communist or pro-Communist leaders to whom the loyalty remains very strong (81). It could be maintained that the Thai people in general remain suspicious of the Vietnamese.

V. Effect on the Indochinese Refugees

It would not be incorrect to say that the Thai people's attitudes toward Indochinese refugees are, to a great extent, influenced by the pre-existing attitudes toward Indochinese peoples. History, ethnic
background, and political relationships have played an important role in influencing and shaping those attitudes. The differences in perception and belief that the Thai people have toward each group are due to past experiences that could not be exactly similar for all of them. However, the experiences that Thailand has had with Vietnamese refugees and the problems which remain unsolved until the present time, have directly affected the more recent Indochinese refugees from the tragedy of 1975. Will History repeat itself once again? The three states of Indochina have now become Communist satellites. What is the next phase that Thailand will face?
Chapter IV: Footnotes


11. LeBar, *op.cit.*, p.98


17. Bernatzit, *op.cit.*, p.93
18. Ibid.

19. Eyre, op.cit., p.33


23. LeBar, op.cit., p.99

24. USIS, Report of the Mobile Information Team: Seventh Field Trip in 1962, p.11


29. Ibid., pp.10-11


32. Steinberg, op.cit., p.11

33. Cady, op.cit., p.52

34. Steinberg, op.cit., p.11

35. Ibid.

36. Ibid.

37. Ibid.

38. Ibid., p.12

39. Ibid., p.13
40. Ibid., p.153
41. Ibid., pp.155-56
42. Fitzsimmons, op.cit., p.57
44. Fitzsimmons, op.cit., p.57
45. Martin Stuart-Fox, Contemporary Laos, (St.Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1982) pp.148, 159-60
46. The term "Isan" is used to designate the regions of northeastern Thailand comprising the Khorat Plateau, formerly under Laotian suzerainty.
48. Adams and McCoy, op.cit., p.449
49. Bunge, op.cit., pp.62-63
52. Ibid., p.75
53. Ibid., p.76
54. Lebar and Suddard, op.cit., p.1
55. Ibid., p.15
56. Ibid., p.16
57. Ibid., p.18
60. Bui-Quang-Tung, op.cit., p.442
61. Ibid., p.445


63. Ibid., published as an appendix

64. Jumsai, op.cit., p.45


66. Ibid., p.11

67. Ibid., pp.12

68. Ibid., p.14

69. Ibid., pp.15-16

70. Ibid., p.40


73. Poole, op.cit., p.96


75. Poole, op.cit., pp.96-97

76. Ibid., p.110

77. Ibid., pp.62, 110

78. Ibid., p.71

79. Ibid., p.74


Chapter V

Thailand's Two Experiences

The assumption of this thesis postulated in Chapter I maintains that whenever the Indochinese states are in crises, the flow of refugees movements are directed toward Thailand. The three Indochina Wars of 1945, 1975, and 1979, all followed this pattern. Although constructed from the past, this assumption will also hold true for future crises that may eventually break out in Indochina since, until the present time, situations cannot yet be stabilized and a state of anarchy seems to be in process. However, the applicability of this assumption also necessitates the presence of fundamental conditions on which this assumption is based to remain similar: an oppressive governing body, the refugees' struggle to survive, and Thailand being the nearest country to assist these displaced persons, coupled with her ability to resist against the oppressive regime. The problem of tackling the root cause of the Indochinese refugeeism, i.e., the Indochina war itself that drives massive movements of refugees out of the affected areas, seems to be beyond the ability of the Thai government to control: no one nation can actually control or prevent the launching of war there, and the Indochinese states are not Thailand's satellites, the fate of which the latter has no power to determine. From this vantage point, the attempt to solve the root cause is only a complementary approach. Refusing to provide asylum in order to avoid subsequent problems is not an alternative either, but is rather a postponement of problems since potential first countries of asylum usually end up by following the direction of international
pressures. It is therefore considered wise for a potential country of refuge to learn from past experiences with refugees and prepare itself to confront such situation when such crises emerge. Under the light of this model, Thailand's two experiences in dealing with the refugees will be first compared in terms of their similarities and differences while an attempt will be made to explain the situations. In the next step, this chapter will aim at evaluating Thailand's refugee policy in order to assess its effectiveness. Finally, it is hoped that suggestions given at the end of this chapter will contribute to the understanding of and dealing with the displaced persons.

I. Comparison

The two cases of the Vietnamese refugees of 1945 and the Indochinese refugees of 1975-1979 represent some similarities which could be grouped in terms of circumstances, policies, and outcomes. The external threatening circumstances that were responsible for procuring the waves of refugees are basically similar, although the degree of severity was much higher in the second case. Likewise, Thailand as a developing country was experiencing economic and unemployment problems at both times when the refugees started to pour into her territory. In other words, it could be argued that the state of economic development in which Thailand found herself does not allow sufficient resources to be reallocated in assisting the refugees. However, this does not mean that since Thailand has no excess material
and financial support, she has to ignore the suffering of those displaced persons. On the contrary, this implies that since she is put in the position by surroundings circumstances to provide first asylum to the Indochinese refugees, recognition should be made by involving foreign governments and international organizations that Thailand's potential is unfortunately limited to providing short temporary refuge. Beyond that, Thailand runs the risk of cracking up under the weight of refugee burdens. In terms of policy, the intention of the Thai government in 1945 as well as in 1975 has been to provide only temporary asylum to the persecuted Indochinese, based on humanitarian considerations and the protection of national sovereignty and interests. This temporary policy has led to the encouragement of voluntary repatriation or negotiations with potential third countries of resettlement. For the refugees residing in Thailand, restrictions on their individual freedoms and the supervision of their activities by the Thai government have been a basic guideline for policy implementation. The policy of restriction and supervision is necessitated by the widespread presence of Communist infiltration, both among the older generation of Vietnamese refugees and among the Indochinese displaced persons in refugee camps. As far as the consequences of the refugee problem are concerned, Thailand has seemingly been experiencing once again the undesirable outcomes that were generated by the Vietnamese refugees of the French colonial period. The present attempts at repatriating Indochinese refugees are even less realistic. By the same token, resettlement in third
countries has started to slow down since the early 1980s. Potential third countries have perceived the perpetual problems of refugees and, as history can indicate, have imposed stricter selective immigration regulations. It, therefore, appears that the government of Thailand is anticipating another generation of Indochinese refugees forgotten on Thailand's soil. It has already been for more than nine years that the Thai government has been providing "temporary" asylum to these displaced persons. There seems to be no definite answer to the question: How much longer will this "temporary" refuge be extended? The definition of the term "temporary" seems to have blurred over time...

While similarities exist, differences between the two influxes of refugees are also found since some involved elements of the circumstances, i.e., the threatening governing bodies of the French government and that of the Communist, were not the same. In this light, during the French domination of the Indochinese states, Thailand supported Ho Chi Minh and the Vietnamese refugees residing in her territory to fight against the colonial power. The motive of giving refuge, besides humanitarian concerns, could also be assessed as one involving politics—directly against French rule, and indirectly to halt possible French expansionism over Thailand. This, in turn, implies that there was no apparent conflict between Thailand and Vietnam, but the relationship between the two countries was rather that of allies: the joint efforts were rather directed toward a foreign
power whose domination was temporary, and once ousted, the French had
no more power over the region. On the other hand, the more recent
experiences with the Indochinese refugees can be broken down into two
sections. First, Thailand is no longer dealing with the Vietnam of Ho
Chi Minh epoch, having common interests in overthrowing the French
regime. Rather, she is dealing with Communist Vietnam labelled by the
Thai government as "Vietnam the Aggressor", who caused the Third
Indochina War. Thus, Vietnam is seen by the government of Thailand as
one of the major causes of the Indochinese refugees --the Kampuchea
in particular-- as well as the cause of burdens imposed on Thailand.
From friendly neighbours, it appears that border tensions are now
mounting between Thailand and Indochina. There have been several cases
of border conflicts, as mentioned in Chapter III, mainly caused by the
Vietnamese troops residing in Kampuchea or by Vietnamese backed forces
in Laos. Furthermore, these nations could be easily manipulated and
transformed by the Soviet Union into a military base or strategic
locations for the purpose of invading Thailand or other Southeast Asian
countries. Thus, it could be said that the Thai government perceives
the Indochinese governments as puppet authorities functional according
to the political tactics of the Soviet Union.

Another differences between the two waves of refugees stems from
the numerical size of the Indochinese refugees. Whereas the earlier
Vietnamese refugees numbered in the tens of thousands, the Indochinese
displaced persons are in the hundreds of thousands. One explanatory
factor is that the Indochinese countries have undergone radical changes in their political systems as opposed to the period of French domination which was a colonial regime. Hence, the impact of the 1975 collapse of Indochina is much more profound in terms of the number of victims, its effects on Thailand, the morale of the Thai people, the Thai villagers directly affected, etc... In this regard, French impetus to the Vietnamese refugees did not cause the loss of life or damage to the property of Thai villagers living in border areas as did the Second and Third Indochina Wars. The more recent Indochina conflicts have resulted, in one aspect, in the Thai villagers becoming "displaced persons" in their own country. This, in turn, added another burden to the Thai government. The large number of Indochinese refugees and the eminent Communist threat gave reason to the Thai government to impose stricter control over the refugees as opposed to the freedom given to and lack of control of the Vietnamese refugees in their initial stage of refuge. Earlier discussions in this thesis have mentioned the Thai government's permission to the Vietnamese refugees to organize the Association of the Overseas Vietnamese for the Salvation of the Fatherland, the Central Committee for the Refugees, etc... No such organizations are now allowed to be established.

As far as the solutions to the refugee problem are concerned, the government of Thailand has resorted to the policy of voluntary repatriation or resettlement in third countries for both cases. However, although the Indochinese case tends to follow the pattern of
the Vietnamese case, a difference lies in the extent to which such policies could be implemented in each case. The success produced by the implementation of policy is subject to the degree of feasibility, which in turn is determined by the circumstances. In this light, the Vietnamese refugees from the First Indochina War preferred to be repatriated rather than resettled in third countries. The circumstances at the beginning made repatriation more feasible since the North and South Vietnamese governments finally agreed to accept their own people. Once repatriated, these refugees were assumed to be able to lead normal life. However, the favourable situation changed when the incident of the Gulf of Tonkin raised an excuse for the government of North Vietnam to terminate the repatriation process. What did the Thai government learn from this repatriation lesson? The refugee issue should be an international concern and the responsibility of which should be shared among involving nations and organizations instead of a bilateral agreement between the country of origin and the country of first asylum. If Thailand had emphasized as heavily on resettlement in third countries as she did on repatriation, she would stand a much higher chance that less Vietnamese refugees would be left in her kingdom and fewer problems remaining to be solved. It could therefore be maintained that from this reflection the Thai government has now changed its policy toward greater efforts of resettlement overseas. Besides this undesirable consequence, the situation in Indochina after 1975 is much different than that after the French occupation. At the present time, there is little doubt that the
Cambodian refugees can be repatriated as long as Vietnamese forces are working on demographic change in Kampuchea; the same assessment seems to stand for the Laotian refugees, especially the Nao, whose lives are being threatened by the Pathet Lao; even in case of the Vietnamese refugees, the Vietnamese government has been expelling its own people to risk their lives at sea, and attempts at repatriating those evacuees are not feasible for the time being. Thus, it could be concluded that repatriation is not the appropriate solution to the Indochinese refugee matter so long as the situations in their homelands are not stabilized. The only alternative left, then, seems to be resettlement in third countries. In this respect, it could be said that many nations of the free world have lent a more helpful hand to the more recent Indochinese refugees than was was the case of French threat to the Vietnamese refugees. A reason lies in the fact that political causes of displacement that the Second and Third Indochinese wars were not a power among the free world itself, but were the Communist regime which is against the free world. Thus, it could be seen as not a fight against an expanding colonial power, but against Communist imperialism that if not mutually helped in stopping, will in the long run threaten the rest of the free world nations.

The comparison of Thailand’s two experiences with the Indochinese refugees reflects some similarities and changes concerning the circumstances, the approaches taken by the Thai government, and the aftermath. It could be argued that the similarities involve the
fundamental characteristics of the situation itself and how the
government of a first country of asylum usually deals with it. The
granting of temporary asylum in both cases, for example, was a basic
reaction to a compulsive situation of the influx of refugees.
Likewise, Thailand's call for international assistance was a normal
procedure. The differences, on the other hand, could be explained as
being caused by some new or different factors involved in the
circumstances. Thus, the new elements in the Second and Third
Indochina Wars could be the Soviet Union's support of Communist regimes
in Indochina, i.e., the Vietnamese invasion of Kampuchea and the policy
of demographic change—similar to what is now happening in Iraq with
millions of Iraqis' deaths under the Russian policy. In this light,
the Vietnamese refugees of the First Indochina War fled from the threat
of an oppressive foreign government; by contrast, the subsequent
Indochinese conflicts involve the residents fleeing from the oppression
of their own governments. However, these differences are not the only
factors that induced the Thai government to change some of its
policies. Equally important were the undesirable consequences from the
earlier Vietnamese refugees: the difficulty of and incomplete
repatriation, the resources drawn to control and supervise the
activities of these refugees, their contact with North Vietnam and
support of subversive activities, and in many instances, their threat
to some Thai citizens. All these matters have been going on since 1945
with varying degrees of severity depending on the ability and interest
of each different administration of Thailand.
II. Policy Evaluation

How effective have Thai policies on refugees been is a difficult question to answer correctly because some of the problems that these policies are supposed to solve are merely universal problems to which an adequate solution has not yet been devised. From this standpoint, the Thai government's policy of giving support to Sihanouk's regime as well as the call for the withdrawal of Vietnamese forces from Kampuchea in order to stop further movements of Kampuchean refugees into Thailand and to repatriate those in holding centres, could be considered as one of the universal approach taken by many first countries of asylum. But the control of the government over this sort of policy is very limited when compared to influencing its own domestic affairs. By the same token, problems generated by the acceptance of a large number of refugees seems to be inevitable. For example, how well can a government policy oversee the conduct of the refugees so that the latter do not endanger social order?

In sum, it could be maintained that the general policy guidelines have been effective under specific circumstances: when relationships between Thailand and the Indochinese states were good during the period between 1958-1964. Or, when the refugee matters fit Thai policy—Thailand's support to the Vietnamese refugees in fighting against the French. Although the refugee policy has undergone changes under different administrations of the Thai government and has been
conditioned by the relationship between Thailand and the countries of origin, as well as by foreign governments and international organizations, more recent policies have taken root in previous policies developed for the Vietnamese refugees. The 1946-1947 policy of encouraging the Vietnamese refugees in Thailand to join Ho Chi Minh in his fight against French domination was effective (although it is not known what were the shares of success brought by the refugees) because Thailand was satisfied with the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu, but also because she could get rid of the refugees who joined Ho Chi Minh, thereby slightly lessening the burden on the Thai government. However, the good relationship with North Vietnam did not turn the remaining refugees into a trustworthy polulation. Furthermore, because of this good relationship, another drawback involved the Thai government's failure to control the Vietnamese refugees who were spread throughout the northeastern region of Thailand. This made it difficult for subsequent policies of control which were necessitated in 1947. The policy of 1958 concerning the evacuation of the Vietnamese refugees away from strategically sensitive border areas to Tarutaow island was not feasible given its cost/effectiveness and had to be finally dropped. The plan was an alternative policy that could not solve existing problems but could prevent further political conflicts -- yet after the policy was dropped, the Vietnamese refugees remained in those sensitive border provinces and no such political conflicts from the increased Communist aggression in Asia developed as envisaged by the Thai government. Moreover, when the Tarutaow policy was abandoned, no
substitute policy was developed right away to meet immediate needs. It was not until the early 1960s that repatriation of the refugees to North Vietnam was undertaken. However, when repatriation ceased in 1964, the government of Thailand still planned to repatriate the remaining refugees and until the present day—twenty years later—those refugees are still in Thailand and repatriation has not been resumed. Thus, subsequent policies which were developed to supervise the activities of the remaining Vietnamese refugees while awaiting repatriation, were merely temporary policies to serve temporary purposes. Hence, no permanent solution to the problems of Vietnamese refugees has been devised to improve or correct the situation. For how much longer these temporary policies will be used is an interesting question.

Thus, it could be concluded that Thailand’s refugee policy is generally effective, especially when a policy is developed to serve specific purpose. However, the policy became less effective after 1965 and 1975 when external conditions were not good. Furthermore, when the number of refugees became too large for the Thai government to deal with. At the same time, drawbacks may eventually occur as mentioned above. In this regard, it rather appears to be a generally accepted fact the outcome produced by a policy is almost never perfect. Allowing for these inherent pitfalls and feasibilities, the result of the Thai refugee policy are seemingly effective. On the other hand, ineffectiveness occurs when a policy no longer fits the situation,
i.e., the continuing use of a temporary policy to solve a long-term problem.

III. Suggestions

It has been the case that the repatriation of the refugees to their countries of origin could not be completed because of other external factors that obstructed the process. In the same manner, it has also been the case that firm commitments pledged by foreign governments to closely cooperate with the Thai government in alleviating the refugee problem and in providing opportunities for third countries of resettlement, tend to fade away in the long run. Since it is likely that the Thai government cannot resist international pressures in providing temporary asylum to the Indochinese refugees, an ultimatum should be given by the Thai government prior to the admission of refugees into its territory. This ultimatum involves a time limit for temporary refuge for three or five years—depending on the circumstances—after which period the refugees will be repatriated regardless of the conditions at home. The Thai government should turn the refugee burden to a direction such as to transform the fate of the refugees into international concern and responsibility. The issue of humanitarian consideration should be limited to the potential of first countries of asylum. It does not seem right if, by solving problems upon humanitarian concern, another party has to suffer as a consequence thereof. Thus, an ultimatum is not in contradiction with the
principles of humanitarianism, for humanitarianism does not alleviate sufferance in one place in order to recreate it in another. On the other hand, it is rather the attempt to ignore this suffering by other committed parties that is responsible for the fate of the Indochinese refugees. However, this thesis does not claim that this is the best solution to the refugee problem so that long-term problems could be avoided, but in this situation, this seem to be a sound alternative.
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