VIETNAMESE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
IN PHILADELPHIA AND CHICAGO

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ABSTRACT

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Extensive Vietnamese residential and institutional communities have formed in Philadelphia and Chicago since the mid-1970s. The purpose of this thesis is to investigate and compare the factors which have influenced the nature of co-ethnic community development in the respective cities. In both cities, the placement sites chosen by voluntary refugee resettlement agencies had a profound impact on the initial and subsequent residential geography of Vietnamese residence. For a variety of reasons, the Philadelphia Vietnamese live in far more dispersed locations compared to their Chicago counterparts. The residential patterns have, in turn, strongly influenced the nature of Vietnamese organizational and business activities in the respective cities. Vietnamese organizations and commercial enterprises are scattered throughout Philadelphia. By contrast, Chicago exhibits a monolithic Vietnamese service and shopping district. The similarities and differences in co-ethnic community development observed between Philadelphia and
Chicago highlight the variable adaptation of the Vietnamese to American urban life.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Since the mid-1970s, significant numbers of Vietnamese have moved to some American metropolitan centers. An extensive Vietnamese community may be identified in several cities. Vietnamese residential concentrations have emerged in certain urban neighborhoods. Accompanying the growth of the Vietnamese population has been the development of co-ethnic organizations and businesses. Vietnamese residential patterns and institutional characteristics are by no means identical from city to city. In certain metropolitan areas the Vietnamese live in widely scattered locations within the inner city as well as suburbs, in others they are heavily concentrated in just a few city neighborhoods or suburban localities. Similarly, depending upon the city, various ethnic mutual assistance associations and commercial enterprises may agglomerate in certain locations or be widely dispersed. A descriptive analysis of the growth of Vietnamese communities in two American cities will provide insight into the variable adaption of members of this ethnic group to American urban life.

The Vietnamese refugee scholarly literature focuses heavily on general processes - migration waves, resettlement, economic adaption, with few specific examples given of these processes at work. There is also an emphasis in the literature upon pathologies associated with
the refugees, i.e., psychological problems, deviant youth behavior, and conflict with other ethnic and racial groups. The news media concentrate heavily on such negative aspects as Vietnamese youth gangs and incidents of conflict between refugees and their neighbors in inner city neighborhoods.

In a more positive vein, the Vietnamese tend to receive media attention in critiques of Asian restaurants and in stories chronicling the high test scores and academic achievements of Indochinese young people in urban schools.

While there have been a few detailed studies of Vietnamese business districts, it is difficult to find any comprehensive research detailing the development of residential neighborhoods or co-ethnic organizations within specific American cities. The literature would benefit from case examples of the variables which have influenced the structure of Vietnamese communities in different metropolitan areas. This particular study will attempt to shed light upon the characteristics of Vietnamese community development by comparing and contrasting the incubation and growth of Indochinese residential neighborhoods and institutions in Philadelphia and Chicago.

Philadelphia and Chicago are useful settings for comparative research on the Vietnamese as both cities have significant Vietnamese populations of similar size. The 1990 census enumerated 10,000 Vietnamese in the Philadelphia region. Over 7,000 Vietnamese were counted in the Chicago
metropolitan area. It should be noted that officials from many Southeast Asian service agencies contest the census figures. It is argued that for various reasons, the census takers missed large numbers of Indochinese. Philadelphia and Chicago each possess several Vietnamese ethnic associations as well as co-ethnic business enterprises oriented towards serving the local refugee populations. The Vietnamese community in each city began forming in the mid-1970s and the flow of Indochinese migrants has continued into both to the present day. In sum, the two cities possess sizable, if not overwhelming numbers of Vietnamese and institutions, which have grown over the same time period.

The two central questions for this research effort are the following:

1. What factors account for the spatial patterns of Vietnamese residence within Philadelphia and Chicago?

2. How do the spatial patterns of Vietnamese residence interact with other variables to influence the institutional characteristics of the Vietnamese community in each given city?

Following an overview of the relevant literature, the emergence of specific Vietnamese residential concentrations will be described for each of the study sites. For the purposes of analysis, Vietnamese residential development will be broken into two eras: 1975-1985 and 1985-1994. This
demarcation is useful because in both cities distinct patterns of settlement are observable in each of the respective time periods.

The analysis of residential trends will be followed by a description of the Vietnamese organizational environment in each city. The influence of patterns of residence and other identifiable factors upon organizational characteristics will be discussed. Vietnamese business district formation in both metropolitan areas will be analyzed in a similar manner. In the concluding section, major findings from the two cities will be summarized and compared as conclusions are posited.

Research methods used for this study include a total of 26 personal and telephone interviews conducted with key informants in both Philadelphia and Chicago, a review of pertinent scholarly books and articles, longitudinal analysis of newspaper articles from local newspapers and other periodicals, dissemination of relevant census data, and many personal observations made at the study sites in the two cities. The utilization of several quantitative as well as qualitative methods of research gathering allows the piecing together of a wide variety of data in order to draw a picture of the Vietnamese community in each city.

The presence of the Vietnamese has strongly affected certain urban neighborhoods. From a social science perspective, it will be useful to observe the economic
impact and ethnic inter-group relations which exist in Vietnamese enclave neighborhoods. Significantly, the detailed description of important events and characteristics associated with the growth of refugee communities in Chicago and Philadelphia will provide site-specific qualitative examples largely missing from the literature and hopefully contribute to a more thorough understanding of Vietnamese adaptation to life in American cities.
CHAPTER 2
OVERVIEW OF LITERATURE

Vietnamese Migration to the United States

The fall of the American-supported South Vietnamese government in April 1975 brought the first significant numbers of Vietnamese to the United States. In the months before and after the collapse of the South Vietnamese regime, almost 145,000 Indochinese associated with the war effort, including government and military officials and their dependents were allowed into the United States under special federal legislation. In the ensuing years, thousands of Vietnamese fled conditions under the Communist government.

Several factors provoked the Vietnamese to abandon their native country. Many South Vietnamese men were forcibly sent to "reeducation camps" created by the Communist regime for the purpose of indoctrinating and punishing those with ties to the former government. Poor living conditions and heavy labor were common in the camps. Some South Vietnamese were forced to move to the so-called "New Economic Zones." These were tracts of land that had been abandoned or damaged by the war. The "New Economic Zones" were designed to reduce the population burden on overcrowded large cities in South Vietnam and to reintroduce cultivation to nonproductive land. Many of the Vietnamese who were forced to relocate had led urban lifestyles before
1975. Conditions were difficult in these barren rural areas for Vietnamese who had little desire or propensity for agricultural work.⁴

The urban middle class residents of South Vietnam suffered severe losses in status after the rise of the Communists. Children of former army officers or governmental officials were often discriminated against and denied admittance to the top educational institutions. After 1978, the government began a policy of nationalizing many private businesses. For many South Vietnamese merchants, business ownership severely declined in profitability. Unemployment became a serious problem as former army officers, bureaucrats, and businessmen lost their jobs. Compounding the above difficulties was a drought in 1977, followed by floods which exacerbated already existing land cultivation problems created by military mining and herbicides. Food became scarce. Given these conditions, many South Vietnamese, particularly the former urban elite and middle class, felt a sense of political persecution and financial desperation which motivated them to escape the country.⁵ Significant numbers of the refugees chose to come to the United States.

Waves of Migration

Scholars have identified two major waves of Vietnamese refugee migration to the United States since 1975. In general, distinct backgrounds and socioeconomic character-
istics are associated with the refugees in each of the major waves. The first wave of refugees arrived in the United States in the immediate period following the Fall of Saigon in the Spring of 1975. The second wave came to America after 1976 and through the 1980s.

The first wave of Vietnamese refugees were primarily army officers, middle-level bureaucrats, students, and professionals associated with the former South Vietnamese government. A good number of these people were well-educated and from middle to upper class backgrounds. Members of this initial group of refugees typically had lived in large population centers in Vietnam with frequent exposure to western culture and the English language due to their contact with foreign officials during the French occupation and subsequent American involvement in Vietnam. The number of first wave refugees to come to the United States has been estimated at 145,000.

The numbers of Vietnamese refugees arriving in the United States dropped sharply in 1976 and 1977. In 1978, natural disasters and political persecution, as well as continued regional conflict in Indochina, precipitated a renewed exodus of refugees. Residents of the former South Vietnam continued to leave. Sizable proportions of those escaping from Vietnam were ethnic Chinese. The ethnic Chinese were fleeing oppressive discriminatory measures imposed by the Vietnamese government for the purpose of
reducing Chinese economic power in the country. Many of the Vietnamese and ethnic Chinese who left Vietnam in 1978 or later, escaped the country by sea, often in dangerously unfit vessels.¹⁰

The "boat people" who survived the trip sought asylum in refugee camps located in neighboring nations including Thailand, Singapore, Hong Kong, and Malaysia.¹¹ Many of the first asylum countries, burdened by the overflowing refugee camps, began to turn away new refugees. In response to the situation, the United States government significantly increased the number of Indochinese refugees who could be accepted into the country.¹² In late 1978 the flow of Southeast Asian refugees entering the United States picked up sharply. The numbers peaked in 1980 when approximately 95,000 refugees from Vietnam (including ethnic Chinese) were admitted into the U.S. The tide of incoming Vietnamese continued at high levels in 1981 and 1982 before leveling off to a rough average of about 25,000 per year in the mid-1980s through the early 1990s.¹³

The second wave of refugees was a far more diverse group compared to the initial wave of arrivals. It should be noted that in addition to Vietnamese and ethnic Chinese from Vietnam, significant numbers of Cambodians, Hmong, and Laotians joined the tide of incoming Indochinese refugees beginning in the late 1970s. These distinctive ethnic and cultural groups from Southeast Asia have contributed to the
divergent characteristics exhibited by the second wave refugees in contrast to the far more homogeneous first wave. However, even the Vietnamese in the second wave are markedly different from their predecessors. Many of the incoming ethnic Chinese have come from middle class, mercantile backgrounds. This is in contrast to a sizable number of the latter Vietnamese arrivals who have come to the United States in poorer health and with fewer marketable skills than earlier refugees. 14 In general, these Vietnamese possessed limited education and English-speaking skills. A larger percentage of second wave refugees had been employed in farming or fishing and far less in professional, commercial and military or governmental occupations. 15

A substantial portion of arriving Vietnamese after the mid-1980s were Amer-Asians. Amer-Asians are Vietnamese who are usually the biological children of Vietnamese mothers and American fathers who were stationed in Vietnam. Amer-Asians face severe discrimination in Vietnamese society. Many Vietnamese people do not consider Amer-Asians as "legitimate" Vietnamese even though most Amer-Asians are culturally tied to Vietnam by language and find adjustment in America difficult. Abandonment by fathers and sometimes by both parents meant that sizable numbers of Amer-Asians have come to the United States with few economic resources. 16 In addition to Amer-Asians, South Vietnamese individuals newly released from reeducation camps in Vietnam
also constituted a significant portion of the Vietnamese arriving in the United States in the latter 1980s and the early 1990s.

Adjustment

Given the greater economic and social resources of the first wave of Vietnamese refugees, as well as the longer time for adjustment, it is not surprising that this group has fared better in American society in comparison to the latter arrivals. The majority of the first wave refugees have experienced material self-sufficiency, if not prosperity. At the risk of generalizing, it may be stated that the refugees of the first wave made significant economic progress in a short period of time and successfully reclaimed middle class status in a new society.17

The second wave refugees have experienced far more problems. These Vietnamese have found it more difficult to become integrated into the mainstream American economy. Many second wave households have survived by piecing together income from a variety of sources contributed by family and friends. Income sources for the typical second wave household might include refugee cash assistance from the federal government, public assistance, informal sector employment, and low-paying service and manufacturing jobs in the formal sector.18 In addition to economic hardships, language barriers and unfamiliarity with western cultural conventions have complicated matters.
Furthermore, the enduring scars from often perilous freedom flights by sea, as well as extended stays in refugee camps, produced health, mental, and psychological problems which have made the adjustment and assimilation for second wave Vietnamese more difficult to achieve.20

Census data make clear the brighter economic fortunes of those Vietnamese refugees who entered the United States earlier. According to the 1990 census, the average per capita income of Vietnamese families who arrived before 1980 was $16,072. By comparison, the average income of families who arrived between 1980 and 1990 was $7,905. Similarly, the census found 12.8 percent of Vietnamese families who came before 1980 were living below the poverty level in 1990. In contrast, 33.2 percent of the families who arrived between 1980 and 1990 were living in poverty.20 As second wave arrivals constituted approximately one-third of the refugees who entered the U.S. before 1980, it may be observed that the greater length of time these refugees have lived in the United States has facilitated their economic adjustment. However, the bulk of refugees who came in the 1980s were admitted in the early 1980s, only a few years later than the 1970s entrants. Given these figures, it seems clear that the second wave refugees, especially those arriving in the 1980s, have experienced much longer adjustment periods and less economic advancement than the initial refugees.
Resettlement Process

In response to the April 1975 fall of the South Vietnamese government, President Gerald Ford assigned responsibility for managing and coordinating the resettlement of Indochinese to a new federal entity composed of eighteen federal departments and agencies. The Interagency Task Force for Indochinese Refugees opened four refugee reception centers - Camp Pendleton, California; Fort Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania; Fort Chaffee, Arkansas, and Eglin Air Force Base, Florida. The major purpose of the centers was to reduce the likelihood of the refugees becoming dependent upon public assistance. The centers were transitional institutions where the average refugee stayed seven months. American movies were shown, and mandatory classes on the English language and employment skills were conducted.²¹

All of the first wave refugees had been released from the reception centers by December 1975. The government reception centers closed and the responsibility for the resettlement of Indochinese refugees was then delegated to a small number of private, non-profit, voluntary resettlement agencies. These voluntary agencies (VOLAGS) receive contractual funding from the federal government. VOLAGS involved with the settlement of Southeast Asian refugees include Lutheran Immigration Refugee Services, Nationality Service Center, United Hebrew Immigration and Refugee
Services, the United States Catholic Conference, and Traveler’s Aid International Social Services.\textsuperscript{22}

The voluntary agencies assist refugees with legal documentation and provide airport reception. After the refugee arrives at their final destination, the VOLAG provides counseling in regards to local employment, health, as well as social and vocational services. Typically, the voluntary agency finds a local sponsor for the refugee. The sponsor, with assistance from the VOLAG, is expected to provide initial food, clothing, and shelter, help with finding employment, assistance with school enrollment, and coverage of medical expenses until the refugee becomes self-sufficient. At the time when the sponsor is no longer willing or able to meet the total needs of the refugee, or when the refugee ends the sponsorship, the refugee may register with the county social services office for public assistance benefits. The refugee receives public assistance until economic self-sufficiency is achieved.\textsuperscript{23}

Federal resettlement policy mandated an initially wide dispersion of Vietnamese refugees across the United States. The arrival of refugees was occurring at a time when economic conditions in the United States were deteriorating. In the mid-to-late 1970s, unemployment and inflation were at high levels.\textsuperscript{24} A 1975 Gallup Poll indicated that a majority of Americans were opposed to the admission of Southeast Asian refugees.\textsuperscript{25} The federal Interagency Task
Force on Indochinese Refugees adopted a policy of rapid and wide dispersion of refugees in order to minimize the socio-economic and political impact that might result from heavy concentrations of Vietnamese immigrants in areas feeling the effects of high unemployment and economic distress.\textsuperscript{26} The 145,000 first wave refugees who arrived in 1975 were resettled in 813 separate locations spread throughout the fifty states. Data obtained at the reception centers indicate that less than half of the first wave refugees were sent to the state of their first preference.\textsuperscript{27}

The initial federal resettlement efforts have drawn criticism. It has been noted that the speed with which the VOLAGS were expected to process refugees made it difficult for them to properly investigate sponsors. The inadequate evaluation of potential sponsors led to several cases of sponsor exploitation of refugees for employment purposes, with wages being paid far below the minimum wage. The policy of wide dispersion created difficulties in that the voluntary agencies often split Vietnamese extended families into numerous households and resettled them in different areas.\textsuperscript{28} The resettlement of many Vietnamese into regions with limited numbers of refugees added additional emotional stress for some of the new immigrants. It enhanced feelings of cultural shock and isolation as very few sympathetic social and cultural supports were available to the newly arrived refugees.\textsuperscript{29}
Secondary Migration

The wide dispersion policies of the federal government did not take into consideration the real familial, cultural, and social needs of the refugees. In response to heavy criticism, the United States government moderated its original refugee dispersion policies in the late 1970s and early 1980s. However, as early as 1976, a widespread pattern of secondary interstate migration by Vietnamese refugees was apparent. After an often brief period of resettlement, many Vietnamese left their initial sites of settlement scattered across the United States in order to group in ethnic clusters located in such places as Southern California, Houston, Dallas, New Orleans, Seattle, Washington D.C., Minneapolis-St. Paul, Boston, Chicago, and Philadelphia.

Some Vietnamese refugees relocated in order to be reunited with relatives, friends and co-ethnics. Other common motivations for secondary migration included a desire for warmer weather, greater opportunities for education, employment and job training, and more extensive welfare benefits and social services. In addition, feelings of alienation in response to hostility found in American society forced many refugees into their own enclaves for protection and comfort, slowing the acculturation process. The most extensive secondary migration has been to California. Data indicate that by 1980, 45 percent
of the first wave Vietnamese refugees lived in a state other than the one to which they had been originally sent. Nearly 40 percent of this initial group of refugees had moved from the first site of resettlement to California. The proportion of first wave refugees that lived in dispersed communities with less than 500 refugees of the same nationality fell from 65 percent in 1975 to 40 percent in 1980. Secondary migration trends continued through the 1980s into the 1990s, reinforcing the numerical dominance of a relative few areas of Indochinese concentration.33

The increased concentration of refugees produced by secondary migration has created difficulties for affected communities. The clustering has burdened local social service agencies in regions with significant refugee populations. Examples include Los Angeles, Contra Costa, and Stanislaus Counties in California, as well as Ramsey County in Minnesota. In each of these counties, at least 40 percent of the refugee population in the late 1980s were secondary migrants. A large proportion of these refugees are "time-expired" and no longer eligible for federally reimbursed refugee assistance benefits. It is the responsibility of county agencies to provide public assistance to "time-expired" refugees in need. The concentration of thousands of refugees into residential enclaves may delay self-sufficiency and reinforce continued dependence upon public assistance. Indeed, the provision of
special education and social service programs to sizable refugee populations may consume significant financial resources of already cash-strapped public agencies.\textsuperscript{34}

It should be noted that the clustering of the Vietnamese within the United States is not necessarily a phenomenon with negative consequences. Researchers have observed that the increasingly concentrated Vietnamese population has begun to follow the ethnic enclave pattern of economic development. As we shall see, in certain inner city areas, the Vietnamese have reversed the processes of economic decline and decay. In these communities, Vietnamese have bought real estate and/or opened businesses and institutions stabilizing deteriorating neighborhoods.

Vietnamese Organizations

The initial federal resettlement policy had a deleterious impact upon the formation of Vietnamese ethnic associations across the United States. The wide dispersion of refugees made it difficult for the Vietnamese to maintain contact with co-ethnics and to create organizations for the purpose of easing adjustment and promoting communal action. Nevertheless, since the late 1970s, Vietnamese ethnic associations and service agencies possessing varying resources and functions have formed in several American cities. Most of the co-ethnic associations service the local population of a given metropolitan area. Very few of
the associations have attempted to form a national or even an extensive regional clientele or membership.

Vinh (1979) identified five basic groupings of Indochinese associations in the United States – religious, political, self-help or mutual assistance, professional, as well as student associations. Religious organizations are typically headed by priests or Buddhist monks and exist for the purpose of worship and activities designed to promote religious fellowship. Political associations have been founded in opposition to the Communist government in Vietnam. Political groups may also work to increase electoral participation and activity by Vietnamese-Americans.35

Self-help or mutual assistance organizations provide social services to the refugee populations. These groups also encourage cultural activities with the intention of fostering friendship and mutual understanding between the Vietnamese and members of the larger American society. Vietnamese professional associations commonly limit membership to those of the same career, social, or academic background. Professional groups tend to be composed of engineers, doctors, or lawyers. Student organizations have been formed for the purpose of promoting co-ethnic solidarity and support in the academic setting.36

Among co-ethnic associations, the mutual assistance and religious organizations tend to have the broadest membership
and the greatest visibility in Vietnamese communities. However, the limitations of many of the Vietnamese mutual assistance associations have been documented. Thuy (1983) argues that in terms of administration, resources, and objectives, most of these organizations are best described as "social groups" because their active membership is generally composed of a few friends or acquaintances. He notes that many of these associations are not very active due to a lack of resources and/or regular staff.\(^37\)

Thuy also maintains Vietnamese organizational development was slow due to the cultural and socio-political background of the refugees. He observes that the past experiences of most Vietnamese were centered upon the support of the extended family unit rather than communal solidarity through organizational membership.\(^38\)

Conversely, it could be argued that traditional Vietnamese village life placed great significance upon certain mutual aid institutions including the rotating credit clubs ("hui"), which served the function of communal money-lending.\(^39\)

Regardless of the historical experiences of the Vietnamese with organizational structures, it is clear that many Vietnamese-American mutual assistance organizations have been quite limited in their effectiveness. The leadership of Vietnamese ethnic associations tends to be dominated by first wave refugees. The organizational
hierarchy is disproportionately composed of upper and middle class refugees who were army officers, government bureaucrats, or professionals in South Vietnamese society. Many second wave refugees tend to come from comparatively lower social class backgrounds and are still struggling in the United States. The second wave refugees, who are now the clear majority of the Vietnamese-American population, often feel little allegiance to organizations directed by Vietnamese from elite backgrounds. There is sometimes a conviction among second wave refugees that the established mutual assistance associations are intended to perpetuate the traditional social status of the Vietnamese even in the new setting of the United States. ⁴⁰

There is often widespread mistrust in the general Vietnamese populace towards certain Vietnamese ethnic associations. Compounding the problem, the views of the Vietnamese organizational leadership commonly do not reflect those of the larger communities. Vietnamese leaders tend to play down internal community problems, fearing that making the issues public would give the community a negative image in the larger society. ⁴¹

It should be emphasized that there are many Vietnamese co-ethnic associations which are quite effective in reaching out and providing essential programs and services to large numbers of refugees. Even those organizations which provide limited functions to a very small clientele may serve
important communal needs for their members. As we shall see, Vietnamese organizational development may be widely divergent among cities with Vietnamese populations of similar size. As might be expected, the structural characteristics of a given Vietnamese community strongly impact the nature of local co-ethnic organizational formation.

Inter-group Relations

In almost every city with an Indochinese population of any significance, there have been well-documented incidents of conflict between Southeast Asians and established residents in neighborhoods with sizable refugee populations. Unfortunately, many of the news stories about the Indochinese focus on such inter-group conflict. There has been far too little media coverage of positive inter-cultural relationships between Southeast Asians and their neighbors. Indeed, such relationships are in many cases the rule rather than the exception. However, there is no denying the fact that there has been substantial inter-group conflict in certain neighborhoods home to the Indochinese. In some cases this friction has negatively impacted the relationship of an entire ethnic group toward a neighborhood and even a city. As an example, nearly the entire Hmong population moved out of the city of Philadelphia after several well-publicized attacks against Hmong refugees in a West Philadelphia neighborhood. Large numbers of Cambodians
and Vietnamese have also moved out of the same neighborhood because of its reputation for hostility against Southeast Asian refugees.\(^43\)

In order to understand why conflict occasionally occurs between established residents and Indochinese refugees in certain neighborhoods it is insightful to take a close look at some of the common sources of inter-group misunderstanding. Sizable numbers of refugees were placed in inner city neighborhoods that were plagued by severe economic dislocations including poverty and unemployment.\(^44\) In many cases, established residents have believed Southeast Asian refugees received preferential treatment in the provision of housing, public assistance, and other social services. Established residents who served in the Vietnam War or lost friends or loved ones in the conflict have often been especially resentful of the supposed benefits showered upon their new neighbors.

Compounding the problem, many refugees have not understood local mores, taboos, customs, and practices in their adopted country.\(^45\) In most cases, neither the refugees nor established residents were prepared for their new neighbors by resettlement officials.\(^46\) In such a context, inter-group conflict was perhaps inevitable.

The Ethnic Enclave

Scholars have noted the presence of ethnic enclaves among many ethnic groups. Most of the existing literature
focuses on the characteristics and experiences of Chinese, Japanese, and Cuban enclaves. It should be noted that the term "ethnic enclave" is sometimes used to describe residential communities in which exist a significant concentration of members from a particular ethnic group. These residential communities may or may not possess sizable numbers of businesses or formal institutions operated by ethnic group members. In much of the ethnic enclave literature, a far more narrow definition is used to define an enclave community. Generally, an ethnic enclave is defined as a neighborhood in which ethnic immigrants and migrants form dense interaction networks, share common institutions, and perhaps most importantly, exploit a common occupational niche.47

The ethnic enclave is typically characterized as providing emotional and social support, acting as a bridge between the old culture and that of the new society. The enclave allows immigrants to turn inward in order to avoid a sometimes hostile society. The occupational component of the enclave is essential to the utility of such a community for an ethnic group. The ethnic enclave may be instrumental in promoting the development of economic self-sufficiency for a particular ethnic minority. According to the enclave model, substantial economic and social progress toward assimilation into the larger society is often possible only after economic development has occurred in the enclave.
Immigrant employment in the enclave makes possible higher education opportunities and eventual upward mobility and assimilation for later generations.\textsuperscript{49}

Perhaps the most influential and prolific scholar in the recent ethnic enclave literature has been Alejandro Portes. In his work, Portes has significantly refined the enclave model, specifying what he believes are the prevailing functions and characteristics of enclave communities. For Portes, the classic ethnic enclave exhibits several features. Enclave businesses typically start small and cater exclusively to an ethnic clientele. The most economically successful enclaves eventually expand to serve a broader market, filling a niche for the larger society. An example may be the historic Chinese concentration in the restaurant and laundry trade in many large U.S. cities.\textsuperscript{49}

A collective solidarity among enclave business persons allows expansion into the larger market. This feeling of solidarity is associated with a sense of reciprocity in the enclave which transcends the purely contractual nature of business transactions. An example of such reciprocity are the rotating credit associations in many Oriental enclave communities. The rotating credit associations perpetuate an obligation among enclave business persons to make contributions so that other co-ethnics have access to capital for the formation or expansion of businesses.\textsuperscript{50}
According to Portes, ethnic enclave employers also have a reciprocal relationship with their employees. Such a reciprocal bond is very unusual between a business owner and his or her employees in the larger society. However, in the enclave, many immigrant employees willingly accept a wage that is inferior to that which could be achieved outside of the enclave. It is understood by immigrant labor that the wage is only one form of compensation for their employment. Enclave employers are expected to promote the advancement of their workers through such activities as on-the-job training, and loans when the employees move into their own entrepreneurship enterprises.  

Enclave employers commonly are sensitive to economic needs of their co-ethnic employees and may allow workers to bring children to work or may look the other way as unreported laborers continue to collect welfare benefits. The relationship between employer and employee is truly reciprocal. The use of low-paid co-ethnic labor allows poorly capitalized enclave firms to stay competitive. Immigrant employees receive benefits unavailable in jobs outside the enclave.  

Portes posits additional characteristics for his prototypical ethnic enclave. The classic enclave possesses an extensive division of labor exemplified by a highly differentiated entrepreneurial class. For Portes, the true ethnic enclave features a number of integrated ethnic firms
which provide employment for a sizable proportion of workers from the same minority group. The economic integration of ethnic businesses includes both horizontal and vertical interaction. Horizontal integration occurs when ethnic business owners cooperate to choose store locations, engage in collective buying, and avoid competitive pricing. Vertical integration is apparent when a wide range of business services are provided by co-ethnics to each other, including credit, wholesale goods, and import/export concessions.

Portes carefully distinguishes his enclave prototype from those immigrant neighborhoods in which a few small ethnically-owned businesses serve immediate, specialized consumption needs but lack a highly integrated and differentiated division of labor. Portes refers to these primarily residential communities as "ethnic neighborhoods," rejecting the enclave terminology often attached to a wide variety of immigrant neighborhoods.

Portes notes that ethnic enclave businesses are typically spatially concentrated, especially in their earliest stages. The reason for this spatial concentration is due to the need for proximity to an ethnic market, which the businesses initially serve. Also, the reliance on a co-ethnic labor force, and the economic integration of activities by enclave businesses require spatial agglomeration of ethnic firms. Eventually, as an enclave
becomes extensive and highly differentiated in function, related businesses may spread throughout a metropolitan area.\textsuperscript{53}

Once an enclave economy has fully developed, it is possible for an immigrant newcomer to live his or her entire life entirely within the confines of the community. Employment, education, and access to health care, as well as a variety of other services are available within the enclave. Such "institutional completeness" enables recent immigrants to move forward economically, in spite of very limited knowledge of host culture and language.\textsuperscript{57} Indeed, Portes maintains that for newly arriving immigrants, participation in an ethnic enclave economy may have positive economic consequences, including a greater opportunity for self-employment. This positive adjustment makes possible the economic basis for a successful assimilation of future generations into the mainstream of American society.\textsuperscript{58}

Vietnamese Business Districts

Portes's rather rigid definition of the ethnic enclave would seem to best characterize such communities as the extensive Chinatowns in New York City, San Francisco, and Toronto as well as the Cuban business areas of Miami. However, several scholars have observed that emerging Vietnamese communities in several cities have increasingly come to resemble ethnic enclaves.\textsuperscript{59} Of all Vietnamese business districts in this country, the "Little Saigon" in
Southern California perhaps most closely achieves the precise characteristics of Portes’s classic enclave. Stephen Gold’s (1992) insightful study of Vietnamese businesses in Orange County is the most comprehensive work to date on the nature of Vietnamese enclave entrepreneurship in the United States.

Gold identifies several distinct factors which motivated Vietnamese refugees to become business owners. He found that a sizable number of Vietnamese entrepreneurs go into small business because they believe themselves to be disadvantaged in the general labor market due to inadequate English skills, inferior educational backgrounds, and lack of American credentials or professional licenses. Several of his informants had advanced degrees from universities in the United States but chose self-employment in order to avoid a "glass ceiling" that was perceived to restrict promotions in corporations and institutions of the larger society.

Gold observed that some Vietnamese refugees established businesses in order to earn income in a situation which permitted limited contact with the unfamiliar American culture. He interviewed many refugee entrepreneurs who spoke little English, preferring the continued immersion in Vietnamese culture made possible by self-employment in "Little Saigon." Informal sector characteristics were associated with certain enterprises in the Vietnamese ethnic
enclave. Some refugees attempted to keep their businesses inconspicuous in order to conceal income from government agencies that provided such benefits as refugee cash assistance, AFDC, food stamps, unemployment insurance, and welfare. Similarly, refugee business owners who did not understand tax or licensing laws maintained unobtrusive operations for fear of being cited for violations. Rotating credit associations and informal banking arrangements were often hidden because of their assumed illegality. In sum, the closed nature of the enclave permitted the practice of activities which would not be acceptable in the mainstream economy.

Gold noted that Vietnamese refugees often chose to own and operate small businesses because it allowed them to provide for family members and utilize family resources in ways that would not be possible in other employment situations. In many instances, the husband took outside employment, while the wife ran the business with the assistance of children. The husband would help with the business after his working hours and on weekends. The pooling of resources in such an arrangement created increased economic security for a family. Furthermore, the usage of family labor helped refugee entrepreneurs minimize labor expenses while providing loyal help.

Gold observed that the heavy reliance on family labor by Vietnamese entrepreneurs sometimes limited the profit
growth and employment-generating possibility of businesses. Certain enterprises seemed to be specifically designed to employ relatives rather than generate profits. In many cases, hiring decisions were made on the basis of family obligation rather than employee skill.  

In addition to the above motives, Gold found that some refugees engaged in entrepreneurship because it allowed them to make a living while simultaneously achieving a high degree of visibility and influence within the Vietnamese community. For example, many Vietnamese professionals operated refugee-oriented practices. These doctors, dentists, lawyers, and accountants preferred the significant social status available in the enclave community to the increased income which could likely be earned through employment elsewhere.

Gold provides evidence of the reciprocal relationship between co-ethnic employers and employees described in Portes's ethnic enclave model. In several "Little Saigon" establishments, refugees were observed to work for lower wages and longer hours than would probably be accepted by workers who were not co-ethnics. However, offsetting the exploitative conditions were certain advantages many refugees received from enclave employment. Vietnamese employees often received gifts of food or clothing from employers. In addition, refugee employees would sometimes work for "under
the table" wages which went unreported in order not to jeopardize government assistance benefits.\(^5\)

In her study of Vietnamese families in Philadelphia, Kibria (1993) noted a significant number of her Vietnamese informants viewed the option of employment in businesses operated by fellow co-ethnics quite favorably. For many refugees, the personal ties, comfortable social environment, and flexibility in work schedules available in co-ethnic employment offset the very low wages and absence of health benefits commonly associated with small ethnic businesses.\(^6\) By contrast, Johnson (1988) studied the employment preferences of refugees and observed that job-seeking Vietnamese almost universally preferred work in large U.S. companies to that in co-ethnic-owned businesses. Employment in the larger society was stated to be preferable because it offered higher wages, shorter work days, health benefits, and opportunity to learn English.\(^7\)

Gold found that a majority of the Vietnamese-owned businesses observed in his study relied upon fellow refugees as consumers for their goods and services. He notes that a strong dependence upon co-ethnic customers violates the ethnic enclave model’s mandate that sales to out-group members are necessary for ethnic economic success. As we shall see, an almost total dependence upon a refugee consumer market has restricted the growth of certain existing Indochinese business districts. The situation is
somewhat different in Southern California, where the huge influx of Vietnamese secondary migrants has provided a sizable number of middle-class and affluent co-ethnic customers. Given the enormous size of the Indochinese population in the Los Angeles metropolitan region, an adequate base of refugees exists to support a large number and variety of "Little Saigon" enterprises. Economic integration among ethnic businesses is an important tenet of the ethnic enclave model. Integration arrangements between wholesalers and retailers provide credit and may create a near-monopoly over the distribution and sale of certain products by particular ethnic groups. Importantly, Gold notes many Vietnamese refugee business owners are not able to create the extensive structures of integration associated with Korean, Chinese, and Cuban enclaves. As a result of an economic embargo, Vietnamese entrepreneurs have not had access to co-ethnic suppliers in their native country. It remains to be seen what impact the lifting of the U.S. embargo against Vietnam in 1994 will have upon Vietnamese-American enterprise in the United States. Gold found very modest economic integration among "Little Saigon" firms. On the contrary, he witnessed intense competition among small Vietnamese shops and restaurants in the ethnic enclave.
Ethnic Chinese Refugees from Vietnam

The characteristics of refugee entrepreneurship described above are most applicable to the ethnic Vietnamese. It should be noted that a substantial number of businesses in most Vietnamese ethnic enclaves are operated by ethnic Chinese from Vietnam. The entrepreneurial activities of the ethnic Chinese diverge somewhat from those of the ethnic Vietnamese. For this reason it is necessary to explicate the differences between Chinese-Vietnamese and ethnic Vietnamese refugees.

The history of Chinese immigration into Vietnam goes back over two thousand years. However, most ethnic Chinese migrated to Vietnam during the long period of European colonial rule, beginning in the sixteenth century. In Vietnam, the ethnic Chinese developed their own residential communities, each with its own institutions, including religious centers, schools, shops, and political organizations. Gradually over the years, the Chinese-Vietnamese came to accept a variety of Vietnamese cultural norms. Though some inter-marriage did occur, most of the ethnic Chinese continued to consider themselves ethnically separate.

The maintenance of close ties with China, along with the distinct ethnic identity, created tensions between the ethnic Chinese and the Vietnamese majority. Tensions were exacerbated by the traditional "middlemen" occupations held
by significant numbers of ethnic Chinese in Vietnam. A disproportionate number of Chinese-Vietnamese resided in urban centers and worked as merchants or money lenders. As a consequence of Vietnamese resentment of ethnic Chinese wealth, the Chinese were subject to several repressive measures designed to end their economic control over trade and retail activities.71

Tensions between the Vietnamese government and the Chinese-Vietnamese population intensified following reunification in 1975. The Communist government was faced with the issue of integrating the sizable Chinese population in the heavily urbanized South with the rest of the nation. In early 1976, ethnic Chinese residents were required to register their citizenship. Those who retained Chinese status were subjected to heavy taxes, job discrimination, and reduction of food rations. In the fall of 1976, all Chinese schools and newspapers were closed. In early 1977, those Chinese-Vietnamese who had registered as Chinese citizens were dismissed from their government jobs and prohibited from public enterprise and retail trade. Food rations were terminated and the free movement of Chinese-Vietnamese within Vietnam was forbidden. In addition, the property of many ethnic Chinese was seized and several thousand Chinese were expelled from the country.72

By the summer of 1978, more than 160,000 Chinese-Vietnamese had fled into China. Several thousand more left
the former South Vietnam by boat. As of 1980, at least 400,000 ethnic Chinese "boat people" had escaped persecution in Vietnam. By the mid-1980s, the ethnic Chinese population of Vietnam was estimated to be practically non-existent.²³

Given their urban, mercantile backgrounds, it is not surprising that many Chinese-Vietnamese refugees have chosen to start businesses in the United States. In American Chinatowns, Chinese-Vietnamese refugees typically operate Vietnamese restaurants. In most Vietnamese-American business districts, many establishments are owned by the Chinese-Vietnamese who are familiar with serving a Southeast Asian consumer market from their occupational experiences in Indochina. Correspondingly, Stephen Gold observes that ethnic Chinese refugees have assumed a major role as marketers to a broadly defined Asian-American population in Southern California.²⁴

Gold notes the more extensive economic integration between Chinese-Vietnamese business owners compared to the ethnic Vietnamese. Chinese-Vietnamese refugees import products from China, and offer each other advice, credit, assistance, and employment.²⁵ In essence, the ethnic Chinese have reinstituted their historic dominance of Southeast Asian commercial activities in the context of the Indochinese-American market.

It is difficult to find accurate estimates of the Chinese-Vietnamese refugee population in the United States.
Various ethnic Chinese residents classify themselves to census takers alternately as Chinese or Vietnamese. However, it seems clear that the Chinese-Vietnamese should be considered a distinct ethnic group with a culture and history unique from that experienced by the ethnic Vietnamese or other Chinese.
CHAPTER 3

VIETNAMESE RESIDENTIAL SETTLEMENT IN PHILADELPHIA 1975-1985

In 1975, immediately after the Fall of Saigon, several hundred Vietnamese refugees were resettled in the Philadelphia area. By 1978, an estimated 3,000 Vietnamese lived in the region. In the mid-1980s, a service agency put the Philadelphia metropolitan Vietnamese population at 19,000. Data indicate Pennsylvania, and especially Philadelphia, were major destinations for Vietnamese refugees arriving in the United States during the 1975-1985 period. In these years of heavy migration to the U.S., Pennsylvania consistently ranked in the top five states receiving the largest annual number of Vietnamese refugees.

Much of the early Vietnamese population growth in Pennsylvania must be attributed to the existence of Fort Indiantown Gap, near Harrisburg. As mentioned, this military base was one of the four Indochinese resettlement camps set up in 1975 to handle the initial influx of refugees into the United States. A substantial number of the Vietnamese passing through Fort Indiantown Gap were resettled in nearby Philadelphia. By the late 1970s, residential clusters of Vietnamese were apparent in Philadelphia. These clusters of refugees attracted new arrivals, as well as Vietnamese unhappy with the lack of cultural and social support available in smaller towns.
Philadelphia became the primate city for the Vietnamese in Pennsylvania. In 1987, a service agency estimated that almost 75 percent of the Vietnamese in the state lived in the Philadelphia area.\textsuperscript{80}

The early growth of Philadelphia’s Vietnamese population was concentrated most heavily in two specific areas of the city. In 1980, the largest number of Vietnamese lived in West Philadelphia, according to census figures. Four West Philadelphia census tracts at this time each possessed over 90 Vietnamese. Among these four tracts was the most heavily populated Vietnamese tract in the city with over 250 enumerated residents. Five years after the first Vietnamese refugees arrived in the city, a sizable enclave also existed in the Logan neighborhood of North Philadelphia. The census tract containing Logan possessed nearly 200 enumerated Vietnamese in 1980 – the second highest total of any one tract in the city. The rest of the Vietnamese population was scattered in several neighborhoods with no additional tract registering more than 80 Vietnamese in 1980.\textsuperscript{81}

The emergence of the initial Vietnamese residential clusters in West Philadelphia and Logan was primarily the result of decisions made by voluntary agencies given the responsibility for resettling Indochinese refugees in the city. The major voluntary agencies resettling refugees in Philadelphia concentrated their placements in the two neigh-
borhoods. West Philadelphia and Logan were chosen for several reasons. Cheap apartment rentals were available in these areas. Neither the refugees nor the resettling agencies possessed much in the way of resources. Furthermore, large apartment buildings were readily available in both neighborhoods to house extended families as well as significant numbers of unrelated Vietnamese. Indeed, an expressed goal of several agencies was to keep groups of refugees together. It was thought that the adjustment of Vietnamese to a new culture in traumatic circumstances would be eased by the social support made possible by sizable numbers of co-ethnic neighbors. In addition, several agencies hypothesized that it would be easier to target needed services to a clustered as opposed to a heavily scattered refugee population.\textsuperscript{82} West Philadelphia and Logan were also attractive because both possessed accessible mass transit connections to employment opportunities and services throughout the city.\textsuperscript{83}

The adjustment of the Vietnamese to life in Logan and West Philadelphia was not an easy one. Many news accounts from the mid-1970s through the mid-1980s focused upon the difficulties endured by the refugees in these neighborhoods. A plethora of newspaper articles described the structural problems, lack of adequate utilities, and poor security plaguing a number of Vietnamese-inhabited buildings owned by absentee landlords in West Philadelphia and Logan. Several
of the buildings were declared "unfit for human habitation" by the city Department of Licensing and Inspection. Officials from one major resettling agency were summoned by a city judge to explain why they had "dumped" Vietnamese refugees in dangerous buildings and subsequently neglected them. Another agency operating in West Philadelphia was shut down by federal officials because of its lackadaisical resettling practices.

Racial and ethnic conflict was prevalent between the Vietnamese, other Indochinese refugees, and Black residents in Logan and West Philadelphia through the late 1970s and early-to-mid-1980s. A 1987 study described the Vietnamese living in "uneasy proximity" to their predominantly Black neighbors in Logan. A 1980 news story described neighborhood opposition to a storefront center set up to assist Indochinese refugees in Logan. Racial tensions in West Philadelphia flared over into well-publicized incidents of violence between Black and Vietnamese youths at local high schools. In addition, frequent ethnic violence occurred between the Vietnamese and Cambodian, Laotian, and Hmong refugees placed together in the neighborhood.

The voluntary agencies responsible for resettlement in West Philadelphia were heavily criticized for their placement decisions. Public criticism centered upon not only the poor condition of much of the refugee housing, but
also the lack of preparatory information given to communities where hundreds of refugees were placed in a relatively brief period of time. The experiences of the Vietnamese in West Philadelphia and Logan significantly impacted the subsequent placement decisions of the voluntary agencies, as well as the residential location choices of the Vietnamese in the city in later years.
CHAPTER 4

VIETNAMESE RESIDENTIAL SETTLEMENT IN PHILADELPHIA 1985-1994

It is somewhat deceiving to make the mid-1980s the dividing point for distinct trends in Vietnamese residential settlement in Philadelphia. Both of the earliest residential concentrations probably began declining in numbers before 1985. At the same time, some of the more recent residential concentrations began forming before 1985, while others did not begin emerging until the late 1980s. However, the mid-1980s is useful as a demarcation point because several neighborhoods clearly gained many of their Vietnamese residents starting at this time, as others suffered significant population losses. The following is an analysis, by Philadelphia neighborhood, of Vietnamese residential trends in the 1985-1994 period. In addition to those neighborhoods described it should be observed that relatively small numbers of Vietnamese are scattered in several other sections of Philadelphia as well as in many suburbs.

West Philadelphia – West Philadelphia, the site of the heaviest initial Vietnamese resettlement, lost its luster as a residence for Vietnamese refugees in the 1980s. Each of the four West Philadelphia census tracts with more than 90 Vietnamese in 1980 had suffered remarkable declines in Vietnamese dwellers by 1990. The most sizable Vietnamese tract in the city in 1980 fell from 259 to 114 enumerated
Vietnamese in 1990. The three other West Philadelphia tracts also lost substantial numbers of Vietnamese; from 134 to 37, 91 to 33, and 94 to 0, respectively.\textsuperscript{39}

The neighborhoods of West Philadelphia already were unpopular among many Vietnamese by the late 1970s. In a 1978 newspaper article, a locally-based Vietnamese Catholic priest stated that because of racial tension and security concerns, most of the Vietnamese who were financially able had already moved out of the neighborhood.\textsuperscript{41} West Philadelphia still had a significant Vietnamese population in the early 1980s when the well-publicized ethnic and racial violence on the streets and in neighborhood schools occurred. Since the early-to-mid-1980s, Vietnamese residents have fled the area. Voluntary agencies stopped resettling incoming Vietnamese in West Philadelphia. Several Vietnamese Catholic priests and service agency employees described the very poor image West Philadelphia has among Vietnamese in the region today. One informant noted the sizable presence of low-income Cambodians, and Laotians in the area as a deterrent to continued Vietnamese residence. Historical ethnic and class antagonism has long existed among the diverse Indochinese groups. As mentioned, tension between Blacks and Asians as well as security problems are associated with the neighborhood. Generally, the Vietnamese strongly value home ownership. Much of the properties in West Philadelphia are large
apartment buildings. The single family homes existing in West Philadelphia are more expensive than elsewhere in the city, putting their prices out of reach of the modest incomes possessed by the majority of first-time Vietnamese homebuyers.

Logan - Logan was the other major initial resettlement area in the city. This section of North Philadelphia also lost Vietnamese residents after 1980. The Census tract which encompasses most of Logan had 181 enumerated Vietnamese in 1980, but only 151 ten years later. A Vietnamese Catholic priest who was based in Logan for a time estimated much greater numbers of Vietnamese had left the area than revealed by the census. The priest cited poor quality housing, conflicts with Blacks, and perceived security threats as provoking an exodus of as many as 80 percent of the former Vietnamese residents. Logan still has a substantial Cambodian population. A Vietnamese informant suggested Logan's image as a low-income Black and Cambodian neighborhood made it unattractive to Vietnamese desiring a "stable" place to live. Logan has also fallen out of favor as a resettlement site with voluntary agencies who have placed many Vietnamese refugees in other neighborhoods since the mid-1980s.

As the Vietnamese population declined in West Philadelphia and Logan, several additional Philadelphia neighborhoods were emerging as significant centers of
Vietnamese residence. These neighborhoods were located in disparate sections of the city. One of the most striking features of the Philadelphia Vietnamese population is the existence of several sizable Vietnamese residential enclaves scattered throughout the city. Each recently formed neighborhood of Vietnamese residence has identifiable features which have motivated the migration of Indochinese to it. These enclaves of residence may be differentiated by the characteristics of their Vietnamese inhabitants.

The Italian Market - The Italian Market neighborhood in South Philadelphia neighborhood may be more closely associated with the Vietnamese in the public consciousness of Philadelphians than any other. This is due to the existence of a visible strip of Vietnamese businesses and restaurants in close proximity to the popular Italian Market. There is a substantial Vietnamese population in the general vicinity of the market. The numbers of Vietnamese have expanded rapidly since 1980. In the tract which is home to the Italian Market, there were 21 enumerated Vietnamese in 1980 and 182 in 1990. In the tract immediately south, the census recorded 20 Vietnamese in 1980 and 147 in 1990. Both census tracts are largely middle-class Italian neighborhoods.

It is not surprising that the Italian Market area has emerged as a major Vietnamese residential concentration. The initial first wave of Vietnamese and subsequent migrants
have fondly shopped at the Italian Market which is reminiscent of outdoor markets in Vietnam. Consequently, the first Vietnamese groceries and restaurants in the city opened in the late 1970s. A great many of the Vietnamese living in the area are homeowners who were attracted to the neighborhood not only for its proximity to the market and Vietnamese businesses, but also because of its perceived security and stable homeownership. It is quite likely that the majority of the Vietnamese residents come from the so-called first wave of refugees, usually having arrived in the U.S. before 1980. These people lived elsewhere in Philadelphia or the United States before saving enough to buy a home.

The Italian Market area is a preferred residential choice for many financially stable, middle-class Vietnamese. As older Italians, or other white ethnics have died or left the neighborhood, increasing numbers of Vietnamese, and also Chinese have moved in. Observers believe the distinctly middle-class nature of the new Vietnamese arrivals has spared the area from the ethnic tensions which have accompanied the arrival of large numbers of Southeast Asians in other Philadelphia neighborhoods.

South Seventh Street - South Seventh Street, below Mifflin Street to Oregon Avenue in South Philadelphia, has a substantial Vietnamese population. This area was the only section of South Philadelphia with a notable Vietnamese
presence in 1980. The census tract containing South Seventh Street possessed 76 enumerated Vietnamese in 1980, the figure doubled to 150 in 1990. Obviously, the numbers of Vietnamese in the area grew in the 1980s but much less than in other sections of South Philadelphia.

For several decades the South Seventh Street area has been considered a "no-man's land", squeezed in between a Black neighborhood to the north and Italian sections to the south, east, and west. Since the late 1970s, Cambodian and Vietnamese families have moved into the area, attracted by cheap rents. Businesses catering to a Southeast Asian market have opened on the street. The existing presence of co-ethnic families and businesses has enticed additional Vietnamese to the area. Many Southeast Asian families live in storefronts converted to residences, often by Vietnamese or Cambodian landlords.

Several Vietnamese informants articulated negative views toward the South Seventh Street neighborhood. Well-publicized incidents of racial violence have occurred in the area between Blacks, Whites, and Asians. Asian youth gangs are a visible presence. A Vietnamese source familiar with South Seventh noted that the neighborhood is perceived as being populated primarily by low-income Cambodians, which as mentioned above, has negative connotations for some Vietnamese. According to 1990 figures, there were three times as many Cambodians as Vietnamese in the census.
The South Seventh Street area possesses some of the most deteriorated housing inhabited by Vietnamese in the city. A South Philadelphia real estate agent observed that most of his Vietnamese clients have tried to stay away from South Seventh when selecting the sites of possible homes to purchase.

Tasker-Morris - The neighborhood located on Tasker and Morris Streets, west of Broad Street in South Philadelphia, has been the site of rapid Vietnamese population growth since 1980. The numbers of enumerated Vietnamese in the corresponding census tract exploded from 51 in 1980 to 381 in 1990. In 1990, the section had more Vietnamese than any other tract in Philadelphia. The majority of the Vietnamese in the Tasker-Morris area are recent arrivals or at least relative newcomers from Vietnam. Some residents have moved to the area from elsewhere in Philadelphia. A significant portion of the Vietnamese in the area have come as immigrants sponsored by family members already in the United States. Much of the Vietnamese population gain in the neighborhood has occurred since the late 1980s. Most of those living around Tasker-Morris are renters of modest income, though a notable number have bought homes in the area.

Vietnamese have been attracted to the Tasker-Morris section because of its proximity to the Italian Market, relatively safe image, and moderate housing prices. Several
Vietnamese informants observed the role of a local Catholic parish in stimulating Vietnamese migration to the area. The Catholic church offers English classes, social services, and a variety of social activities to Vietnamese residents. A Vietnamese priest affiliated with the parish noted that a sizable number of Vietnamese moved to the Tasker-Morris neighborhood because of the services offered. It should be stated that the Catholic voluntary agency has not been actively involved in resettling Vietnamese in this section of the city. Rather, Vietnamese have migrated to Tasker-Morris on their own initiative to take advantage of the services offered there. Tasker-Morris is a racially mixed neighborhood with many Whites, Blacks, Cambodians, and Filipinos, in addition to Vietnamese. The area has not been plagued by severe incidents of racial and ethnic conflict.

Mount Moriah – The Mount Moriah neighborhood in the southwest corner of Philadelphia has experienced an influx of Vietnamese since the mid-1980s. Data from three census tracts encompassing Mount Moriah illustrate the Vietnamese migration into the area. The heaviest populated of the tracts saw an increase from 0 Vietnamese in 1980 to 263 in 1990. An adjacent tract went from 0 to 175 Vietnamese, while another tract in the area had 36 enumerated Vietnamese in 1980 and 178 a decade later.

Most of the Vietnamese have moved into Mount Moriah after living for a time elsewhere in Philadelphia – West
Philadelphia in particular. The Vietnamese in the neighborhood are primarily homeowners. The area is attractive to Vietnamese with moderate incomes looking to buy their first homes. Mount Moriah’s housing prices are considered among the lowest of decent quality in the city. There has been much more racial tension in the neighborhood compared to other areas in the city where many Vietnamese own homes. The tension received extensive public attention after Vietnamese teenagers were charged with killing a white youth on a neighborhood playground in 1991. Vietnamese have complained of racially-motivated hostility and acts of vandalism in Mount Moriah. Despite the unfortunate incidents of racial conflict, the neighborhood has continued to attract Vietnamese homebuyers in recent years.

Upper Darby - Upper Darby is a suburban municipality adjacent to West Philadelphia. This community has become extremely popular as a Vietnamese residence since the early-to-mid-1980s. Census figures show the dynamic growth of the Vietnamese population in the area. The Vietnamese have primarily moved into three census tracts in Upper Darby. The tract with the most Indochinese in 1990 saw the numbers of Vietnamese increase from 23 in 1980 to 325 in 1990. An adjacent tract went from 14 to 141 Vietnamese over the decade. Another nearby tract experienced a gain from 5 to 100 enumerated Vietnamese in the same time period.
Most of the Vietnamese who have moved to Upper Darby are middle-class, former Philadelphia residents. The vast majority of the Vietnamese in the area are homeowners. The housing stock in Upper Darby is highly valued by many Vietnamese because of its suburban feel with space unavailable at such modest prices in Philadelphia or other suburbs. Upper Darby is easily accessible to transit connections in Philadelphia and is perceived as safer, with higher quality schools. In addition, a local Catholic parish with extensive Vietnamese-oriented religious and social activities has attracted several Vietnamese families. Furthermore, a Vietnamese Buddhist temple in a nearby suburb has added to the desirability of the area. Numerous Vietnamese informants noted the positive image of Upper Darby among Vietnamese in the region.

Kensington – Since the mid-1980s, Kensington has been perhaps the most significant site of Vietnamese resettlement by Philadelphia voluntary agencies. Catholic Social Services, in particular has concentrated its Vietnamese placements in the neighborhood. The Catholic agency chose Kensington as a site to place large numbers of Amer-Asians and newly arrived former re-education camp detainees. Kensington was chosen because of its very inexpensive rental housing and easily accessible mass transit to job opportunities and services in the city.
Census data show the emergence of a Vietnamese population in Kensington after 1980. The Vietnamese are concentrated in two tracts in the area. One of the neighborhood tracts had 0 Vietnamese in 1980 and 318 in 1990; the other tract possessed 0 in 1980 but had 209 enumerated a decade later. Kensington has a negative image among many Philadelphians. Its housing stock is generally quite deteriorated and many storefronts, rowhomes, and old factories are abandoned. Ethnic and racial conflict among White, Black, and Hispanic residents has long marred the blue-collar neighborhood. Thus, it is not surprising that several Vietnamese spoke of Kensington unfavorably. A Vietnamese Catholic Priest based in a nearby neighborhood perceived a large proportion of the Kensington residents to be North Vietnamese. He noted that many North Vietnamese come from impoverished, peasant backgrounds. Kensington qualifies as an acceptable first residence for these people. The priest said he did not feel that many South Vietnamese newcomers would agree to live in the neighborhood. Most of the South Vietnamese have urban, middle-class oriented life histories. Interestingly, extensive ethnic conflict has not occurred in the low-income area. A Catholic Social Services official attributed the relative lack of tension to the efforts of her agency in meeting with and educating neighbors as the new residents were placed in the neighbor-
hood. Such efforts contrasted sharply with earlier Indochinese resettlement activities in the city.¹¹²

**Feltonville** - Feltonville is a North Philadelphia neighborhood which became a popular resettlement and migration site for Vietnamese arrivals in the mid-1980s. In 1990, Feltonville was the second most populous Vietnamese census tract in the city. The Feltonville tract had just 6 enumerated Vietnamese in 1980 but possessed 336 a decade later.¹¹³ Voluntary agencies have placed several Amer-Asians and re-education camp detainees in the area. Vietnamese refugees have also moved to the neighborhood from elsewhere and sponsored family members arriving from Vietnam as immigrants. Feltonville is attractive because of its moderately priced rental housing. The rowhomes in the racially mixed area are generally in better condition than those available in Kensington, Logan or elsewhere in North Philadelphia.¹¹⁴

**Olney** - Olney is a neighborhood in far North Philadelphia which has been attractive to an ethnic and racial diaspora of aspiring middle-class residents because of its affordable, and relatively modern and spacious housing. In the 1980s, the Vietnamese joined other Asians, Hispanics, Blacks, and Whites buying homes in Olney. Three census tracts encompassing Olney registered significant gains in Vietnamese between 1980 and 1990. The most populous tract had 4 enumerated Vietnamese in 1980 and 237
in 1990. Adjacent tracts jumped from 21 to 104, and from 20
to 102 Vietnamese, respectively. Many of the
Vietnamese living in Olney are first-time homeowners who
moved to the neighborhood after living several years
elsewhere.
Figure 1. Vietnamese Population, 1990

Philadelphia by Census Tract

Each Dot Represents One Vietnamese Person

Source: 1990 Census of Population and Housing
Maps Prepared by the Social Science Data Library
Figure 2. Neighborhoods of Vietnamese Residents, Philadelphia.
CHAPTER 5

VIETNAMESE ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE IN PHILADELPHIA

The residential geography of the Vietnamese in Philadelphia has combined with other factors to produce an observable organizational structure among members of this ethnic group. In order to discern the general characteristics of Vietnamese institutional life in the city it will be useful to describe the functions of the major organizations and the nature of their interactions with one another.

The Vietnamese United National Association is the oldest existing Vietnamese organization in the city. The association was begun in 1976 and for several years had headquarters located in the heart of a major West Philadelphia refugee resettlement area. Later, the association moved its offices to the Italian Market neighborhood in South Philadelphia. An official of the agency explained the rationale for this move. The Italian Market area is a site where many Vietnamese come on a regular basis to shop. An office in this neighborhood was chosen to increase accessibility for Vietnamese residing in increasingly scattered locations throughout the metropolitan region.116

The Vietnamese United National Association has offered translation assistance, language and cultural classes, recreational activities for young people, and other
services. The agency's director claimed a wide service base, covering the Philadelphia metropolitan region. In reality, the association appears to be severely underutilized. The association's director acknowledged frustration over a lack of service clients. Other Vietnamese informants familiar with the organization noted its meager resources and staff, small clientele, and relative inactivity.

The Indochinese-American Council was founded in 1982 in the Logan neighborhood. The organization started as a broad service-oriented agency but has since narrowed its focus to mostly education-oriented activities. The agency's founder and executive director is Vietnamese. The council's board of directors and staff is pan-Asian and multi-racial. Initially, the organization heavily targeted Vietnamese refugees. A "Vietnam House" was formed to provide activities and services to recent arrivals. The numbers of Vietnamese served by the agency in recent years is surprisingly small. Staff members acknowledged the lack of Vietnamese clientele. The Indochinese-American Council is utilized by many Cambodians, Blacks, and Haitian refugees. The service population partially reflects the composition of the surrounding neighborhood. As noted, many Vietnamese have moved out of Logan in recent years. Agency officials claim a citywide service base but most clients appear to come from Logan or adjacent neighborhoods.
Several Vietnamese informants noted the controversial image of the Indochinese-American Council's leadership in the Vietnamese community. An official of the agency has been criticized for perceived political connections with Vietnam’s Communist government. The public outspokenness of the center’s leadership in Philadelphia city affairs has also been a source of tension with other Vietnamese leaders who prefer less activist-oriented strategies to improve the conditions of refugees. A staff member of the organization acknowledged that political issues had damaged the image of the agency and contributed to its small Vietnamese clientele.  

The Indochinese-American Council is the most heavily funded of the Vietnamese-run organizations in the city. The leadership of the organization is affiliated with the Philadelphia city education and literacy departments. The agency receives sizable grants from the Pennsylvania state Departments of Education and Labor. The organization possesses far more educational resources and training equipment compared to the other ethnic associations analyzed in this section. Given its extensive funding, the agency is mandated to provide services to a racially and ethnically mixed service base. An informant suggested that the presence of such a broad clientele is another possible turnoff to Vietnamese who might prefer a service provider with a more specialized co-ethnic orientation.
The Asian-American Youth Association is a service agency founded in 1987 in South Philadelphia. A few years later it moved to facilities in Southwest Philadelphia. The organization's founder is Vietnamese. The service agency targets Asian-American youth residing in inner-city neighborhoods, with an emphasis on Vietnamese and Cambodians. The organization has provided English classes, tutoring and recreational activities to young people. The association sponsored two plays featuring Vietnamese and Cambodian youth narrating their life histories. The service clientele for the agency is predominantly Vietnamese reflecting the population composition of the Mount Moriah section from which it draws most of its clients. The organization has also been active in advocacy efforts protesting the police policy of taking mug shots of uncharged Southeast Asian teenage males, as well as challenging city officials to provide increased services targeted towards Vietnamese and Cambodian children.120

Two Catholic parishes in the Philadelphia area offer extensive services oriented towards a Vietnamese clientele. Asian Social Services is an agency operated by a Vietnamese priest affiliated with St. Thomas Aquinas parish in the Tasker-Morris section. Since 1988, Asian Social Services has provided English classes, counseling, and a wide array of religious and cultural activities to a primarily Vietnamese service population. The agency is heavily
utilized by Vietnamese living in its surrounding neighborhood. In recent years, several hundred Vietnamese have been enrolled annually in the organization’s English classes. Informants familiar with the agency noted the presence of the parish and its services is a factor accounting for the sizable migration of Vietnamese to the area since the late 1980s. While the agency’s clientele is primarily from the Tasker Morris area, some Vietnamese have moved to the neighborhood from elsewhere in the city to take advantage of the available services.\textsuperscript{121}

St. Alice’s Catholic Church in Upper Darby provides programs utilized by hundreds of Vietnamese. A "Vietnamese Activities Center" is operated by a Vietnamese priest affiliated with the parish. Vietnamese cultural, social, and religious activities have expanded greatly in scope and clientele since their initiation in 1990. The service population of the Vietnamese Activities Center is primarily drawn from surrounding Upper Darby neighborhoods. The presence of the church has increased the attractiveness of the area to incoming Vietnamese residents.\textsuperscript{122}

The Vietnamese Former Political Prisoner’s Association is an organization which has become active sponsoring events of significance to Vietnamese imprisoned and forced to leave their home country. A Vietnamese Chamber of Commerce was formed in the 1980s among co-ethnic businesses operating in the Italian Market area. This group has been largely
inactive for several years.\textsuperscript{123} The Southeast Asian Mutual Assistance Associations Coalition (SEAMAAC) is an agency created by a consortium of Cambodian, Hmong, Laotian, and Vietnamese Mutual Assistance organizations to provide health and education services as well as advocacy for Indochinese residents of Philadelphia.\textsuperscript{124} The Vietnamese United National Association is a member of the coalition. While SEAMAAC works to promote relevant issues citywide, its service population is drawn most heavily from its native West Philadelphia. Consequently, relatively few Vietnamese utilize most of the agency's services.

Perhaps the most striking feature of the Vietnamese organizational environment in Philadelphia is the lack of an agency with a sizable service clientele drawn from throughout the entire metropolitan area. The most active Vietnamese organizations tend to serve residents of the city sections in which they are located. The Indochinese American Council mostly serves Vietnamese from Logan, Feltonville, and Olney; Asian-American Youth Association-Mount Moriah and Southwest Philadelphia; Asian Social Services (Thomas Aquinas Church)-the Tasker-Morris neighborhood; Vietnamese Activities Center (St. Alice’s Church)-Upper Darby.

The dispersed residential geography of the Vietnamese in Philadelphia has created an organizational atmosphere where several agencies have emerged to serve residents in
distinct regions of the city. Agencies that claim to serve Vietnamese from throughout the city, i.e. Indochinese-American Council, Vietnamese United National Association, and SEAMAAC, have in reality been largely unsuccessful in meeting this goal. The wide dispersion of the Vietnamese population has contributed to organizational fragmentation and the lack of utilization of certain agencies.

There are other factors which may account for the fractured Vietnamese organizational environment in Philadelphia. Strong philosophical differences exist among Vietnamese leaders in the city. Several of the groups are operated by older, former South Vietnamese residents. Generally speaking, these persons are fairly conservative and cautious in their public actions. By contrast, the leadership of the Indochinese American Council is quite outspoken on many issues. This strategy seems inappropriate to officials with some other organizations. The Asian-American Youth Association is directed by a younger generation of leaders. The group publicly advocates for the welfare of Vietnamese youth. There is sometimes a generational gap between the goals of younger people and the older, middle-aged leaders. Younger leaders are probably less interested in political issues back in Vietnam, and perhaps more concerned with forcefully advocating for improved conditions among the Vietnamese in Philadelphia.
Most of the secular co-ethnic associations in Philadelphia have a very limited clientele and have been unsuccessful in attracting large numbers of Vietnamese to use their services. In her study of Vietnamese families in Philadelphia, Kibria noted this characteristic of the organizational environment. Kibria observed the absence of a strong and cohesive Vietnamese organization in the city. She quotes a city service agency employee: "I can give you a list of maybe 10 or 15 men who are considered by us as the leadership or representatives of the Vietnamese. But its not a very organized kind of thing. I doubt that most Vietnamese actually have any contact with these guys."

Kibria found that none of the several Vietnamese ethnic associations seemed to hold much legitimacy in the perceptions of her Vietnamese informants. Many of her Vietnamese sources were suspicious of the organizational officials. She notes the social class background of the leaders; many of whom came from the elite of Vietnamese society in the first wave of refugees. The differences in social class between the leaders and the majority of Vietnamese residents was observed to be a source of considerable distance and occasional hostility.

Kibria noted that her Vietnamese informants were more heavily involved with religious organizations than with the co-ethnic associations. Evidence collected for this study strongly supports such an assertion. The services and
activities offered for the Vietnamese by St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Alice's Church are heavily utilized. The social, religious, and cultural activities provided by these parishes are each used by hundreds of Vietnamese, many of them non-Catholics. A Vietnamese priest unaffiliated with either parish but familiar with each, explained the role of the church in the community life of the respective neighborhoods. He stated that many Vietnamese people in Philadelphia don’t trust the secular organizations. He noted that the leaders of most of these organizations are perceived in the community as being largely uninterested in the affairs of the common people. Some of the organizational officials are thought to be mostly concerned with the status and power that comes with a leadership position. Furthermore, the priest argued that most of the secular leaders in the city do not offer creative approaches to recruiting and serving clients. Another Vietnamese Catholic priest offered similar sentiments. He stated that there was a leadership vacuum in the local Vietnamese community. In his perception, secular organization officials are generally considered incompetent and untrustworthy. Therefore, he believes many Vietnamese turn to the Catholic parishes to provide needed services and activities.

There was very little interaction observed amongst either the various secular organizations, or between the
secular organizations and the parish-based programs. Officials of most of the secular organizations acknowledged the lack of communication and divisions existing between their groups. Vietnamese Catholic priests in the city explained their distance from secular associations in various ways. One priest stated that he feared his credibility in the community would be harmed if he got too close to any agency associated with a particular political agenda. Another priest explained that he was too busy serving needy people to be concerned with the activities of ineffective and underutilized organizations. Several Vietnamese informants not affiliated with the church also expressed disdain for the secular co-ethnic associations and observed the important service role played by certain Catholic parishes in Philadelphia. There are 3 Vietnamese Buddhist temples in the Philadelphia region. Neither temple is active in social service activities. The traditional role of the Buddhist monk or nun is much different from that of the Catholic priest or nun. The Catholic church is much more likely to be involved with social outreach while ordained Buddhists primarily offer guidance in religious matters.

In sum, the Vietnamese organizational environment in Philadelphia may be characterized as being highly fractionalized. Several different associations, secular and church-based, serve distinct geographic areas of major
Vietnamese concentration. In general, the secular organizations are much less utilized than the major parish-run programs, though some of the former agencies possess much greater physical and monetary resources. The relationship among the Vietnamese associations is marked by political and generational differences in leadership goals. However, the situation is not one of particularly tense competition as most of the groups serve a clientele drawn heavily from a distinct location in the region.
CHAPTER 6
VIETNAMESE BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT IN PHILADELPHIA

Since 1975, scores of Vietnamese business establishments have opened in Philadelphia. The majority of these enterprises are centered in areas with major residential concentrations of co-ethnic customers. The spatial patterns of residence have combined with other factors to shape the nature of Vietnamese commercial development in the city. The following section will describe Vietnamese business formation as it has occurred in the Philadelphia region.

South Eighth Street - The first Vietnamese restaurants and groceries opened in the Italian Market section of South Philadelphia in the late 1970s. Pioneer Vietnamese restaurant and grocery proprietors set up shop on South Eighth Street in 1976 and 1977. In newspaper articles, the early entrepreneurs attributed their locational decisions to the presence of the Italian Market. The Italian Market has attracted Vietnamese consumers because of its open air atmosphere and fresh meat and vegetables. After 1980, the number of Vietnamese businesses on or adjacent to South Eighth Street began to expand at a rapid pace. Many of the older, mostly Italian, business owners were retiring and there was limited market demand for the old storefronts in the neighborhood. Vietnamese entrepreneurs found bargain
rental and sales prices for properties in this still relatively desirable commercial area.\textsuperscript{127}

The peak years of Vietnamese commercial growth in the Italian Market area occurred in the mid-to-late 1980s. In this time period, the South Eighth Street area was the major shopping destination for Vietnamese from throughout the Philadelphia region. Vietnamese would combine a trip to the Italian Market fresh food stands with visits to Vietnamese restaurants and groceries, hair dressers, video stores and other businesses in the vicinity.\textsuperscript{128}

The primacy and vitality of the South Eighth Street businesses has been hindered by an Asian-oriented mall that opened on Washington Avenue in South Philadelphia, eight blocks to the west, in 1990. Each of the dozen businesses in Hoa Binh Plaza is operated by Vietnamese or ethnic Chinese from Vietnam. The largest Vietnamese grocery in the metropolitan area is the anchor for a variety of smaller businesses in the complex. Perhaps the biggest attraction of the mall is its large, fenced parking lot which offers free, secure, and convenient parking for shoppers.

Without exception, every Vietnamese informant interviewed noted the popularity of Hoa Binh Plaza as the primary shopping destination for co-ethnics from all over the Philadelphia region. The Vietnamese businesses on South Eighth Street have suffered as a result of the mall. A Vietnamese source observed that the small stores adjacent to
the Italian Market are now seen by many as unsophisticated and time-consuming to shop in. None of the tiny groceries in the area can compete with the selection and prices offered at the mall supermarket. Not surprisingly, many of the Vietnamese entrepreneurs operating near the Italian Market believe Hoa Binh Plaza has negatively impacted the profits of their businesses.¹³¹

The Italian Market itself is still heavily used by Vietnamese from throughout the city and region. However, the growth of Vietnamese businesses in the nearby neighborhood has stagnated. There are presently more than 30 Vietnamese-oriented establishments in the area. The lack of continued heavy Vietnamese business formation near the Italian Market may be attributed to other factors in addition to competition from the mall. The majority of the Vietnamese businesses in the area cater almost exclusively to a co-ethnic population. After the mid-1980s, the number of Vietnamese coming to Philadelphia dropped off. Those arriving in the city moved to scattered locations. Quite simply, most of the small businesses in the Italian Market area serve a very limited base of Vietnamese. Even many of the restaurants in the area are largely targeted to co-ethnics. The most successful businesses in the neighborhood are a few restaurants which have marketed themselves to the broader public. As Vietnamese become more acculturated to American life they are less interested in shopping at small
co-ethnic stores, such as those on South Eighth Street. Expedience becomes a priority and outlets such as Hoa Binh Plaza, other larger Asian supermarkets, as well as mainstream chain stores are primary shopping destinations.

**Chinatown** - Several Vietnamese sources observed the attractions of Philadelphia’s Chinatown to co-ethnic consumers from throughout the region. Very few Vietnamese or ethnic Chinese from Vietnam live in Chinatown. However, there are several Vietnamese restaurants in the neighborhood. The majority of the Vietnamese restaurants are probably owned by ethnic Chinese. Vietnamese patronize Chinatown for its restaurants and groceries. Upscale restaurants in Chinatown are popular choices for Vietnamese wedding gatherings. Along with the Italian Market and Hoa Binh Plaza, Chinatown is the major business area which draws Vietnamese from scattered Philadelphia neighborhoods and suburbs.

**Logan** - Beginning in the early 1980s, several businesses owned by Vietnamese, ethnic Chinese, as well as Cambodians, opened on Old York Road in the Logan neighborhood. After the Italian Market, Logan is the most extensive Southeast Asian business district in the Philadelphia region. There are approximately 30 Indochinese-oriented groceries, video stores, restaurants, gifts shops, and other businesses in the vicinity of Old York Road. The substantial presence of Cambodian
establishments differentiates the area from South Eighth Street. Indeed, Old York Road would probably be considered the most prominent Cambodian shopping district in the metropolitan area. The attraction of the Logan businesses to Vietnamese consumers diminished with the movement of co-ethnics out of the neighborhood. In the early-to-mid-1980s, Logan was considered a primary shopping area by many Vietnamese living in the northern half of the city and adjacent suburbs. In recent years, Vietnamese consumers visiting Old York Road establishments are probably drawn most heavily from the surrounding neighborhood and nearby Feltonville and Olney. Logan's negative, crime-ridden image and tiny ethnic stores have hindered its vitality as a Vietnamese shopping area.132

South Seventh Street - Also since the early 1980s, a contingent of businesses directed to Indochinese consumers has emerged on South Seventh Street in South Philadelphia. A street count showed more than 20 Asian-oriented businesses including several groceries, restaurants, and jewelry stores. South Seventh Street was a major Jewish shopping district earlier in the century. Eventually, the area fell into decay as a result of severe disinvestment. Despite the presence of the new Southeast Asian businesses, the environment on the street has not improved in recent years. Many properties are quite dilapidated and youth street gangs of various races and ethnicities taunt each other. Several
old storefronts on the street have been turned into makeshift residences by Indochinese refugees. Given the heavy Cambodian concentration in the vicinity, the street has a reputation as a Cambodian shopping area. Only a few businesses, however, are actually owned by Cambodians. The other enterprises are operated by Vietnamese, ethnic Chinese, and Korean storeowners who target a general Southeast Asian market. According to informants, the limitations of the existing stores and the dirty, unsafe image of the street serve to restrict South Seventh Street's Vietnamese clientele to those who live in the immediate adjacent area.

Tasker-Morris - Several businesses oriented to an Indochinese market have opened in the Tasker-Morris neighborhood of South Philadelphia since the mid-1980s. Eight visibly Asian enterprises were enumerated in the area including four groceries. The businesses in the Tasker-Morris area are small and serve the basic needs of the substantial numbers of Vietnamese and Cambodians in the neighborhood.

Mount Moriah - After the mid-1980s, a variety of Vietnamese-oriented businesses began appearing in storefronts located along Woodland Avenue, the major business corridor in the Mount Moriah neighborhood of Southwest Philadelphia. The development of businesses operated by Vietnamese and ethnic Chinese has coincided with
the influx of Vietnamese homeowners into the area. These residents constitute the primary clientele of the businesses. While almost all of the Vietnamese enterprises are located on Woodland Avenue, they are scattered throughout a seven-block section of the street. The Vietnamese-oriented stores are situated side-by-side with mainstream businesses. The lack of a dense concentration of Vietnamese commercial establishments differentiates Woodland Avenue from the other major co-ethnic shopping areas in the region.

**Kensington** - Since the mid-to-late 1980s, a Vietnamese shopping district has formed on Huntingdon Avenue in the Kensington neighborhood. Significant disinvestment in the area contributed to the availability of cheap storefronts on the major business corridor adjacent to the blocks where heavy refugee resettlement has been concentrated. Sixteen Vietnamese-oriented businesses, including 4 restaurants and 4 groceries, were observed on the Kensington strip. The small businesses on Huntingdon Avenue mostly serve the Vietnamese residents of the surrounding vicinity. In addition to the above neighborhoods, it should also be noted that very small numbers of co-ethnic businesses serve the residential concentrations of Vietnamese in Upper Darby, Feltonville, and Olney.

In conclusion, the spatial patterns of residence very much influence the nature of Vietnamese business development
in the city. Philadelphia lacks a sizable enclave of Vietnamese commercial enterprises. The largest concentration of businesses in the city is the thirty or so located on South Eighth Street, near the Italian Market. Lesser concentrations are located in major Vietnamese residential neighborhoods including Logan, South Seventh Street, Tasker-Morris, Mount Moriah, and Kensington.

The commercial destinations frequented by large numbers of Vietnamese from throughout the entire metropolitan area are Hoa Binh Plaza—a popular mini-mall with a large grocery store, the Italian Market meat, fruit, and vegetable stands, and Chinatown restaurants and groceries. Of the Vietnamese business districts, South Eighth Street draws co-ethnics from the widest area. However, this neighborhood’s importance to Vietnamese consumers has decreased in recent years due to a number of factors. The rest of the Vietnamese shopping areas primarily serve the basic immediate needs of consumers in geographically distinct neighborhoods. Much like the organizational environment, Vietnamese business development in Philadelphia is largely fractionalized and neighborhood-based. Even the sites which draw significant numbers of the widely scattered population are relatively limited in size and function.
CHAPTER 7

VIETNAMESE RESIDENTIAL SETTLEMENT IN CHICAGO 1975–1985

After the Fall of Saigon in 1975, the voluntary agencies active in Chicago placed the vast majority of first wave refugees in a few Northside neighborhoods. Many of the initial Vietnamese were resettled in Uptown. Smaller numbers of refugees were placed in Edgewater, West Ridge, and Rogers Park immediately to the north of Uptown. Uptown was a popular placement site for several reasons. This neighborhood had sizable quantities of cheap housing available to house refugee families. Uptown was notorious for its image as a "port of entry" for a diversity of low-income people. The area has a large concentration of sizable apartment buildings, many of which had served as the primary "dumping" ground for ex-mental hospital patients in the city. In the 1960s and 1970s, many Appalachians and American Indians moved into the neighborhood's housing, often only for a brief period of time. By the mid-1970s, recent immigrants including Cubans, Mexicans, Arabs, and Koreans had joined Uptown's highly mobile population.

Uptown was generally considered a temporary residence for those who were attempting to establish or reestablish themselves in society. Each of the sizable apartment buildings could house many extended families or unrelated Vietnamese. Indeed, voluntary agency officials believed the concentration of incoming Vietnamese refugees in close
proximity to one another in Uptown and adjacent
neighborhoods would ease the emotional trauma of adjustment
to the unfamiliar American culture. It was hypothesized
that within an enclave of refugees, leaders would emerge who
could serve as intermediaries providing social support and
information to a tightly bound community.136

Uptown was also attractive as a placement site because
of the presence of many non-profit and city social service
agencies which had long served the needy low-income
residents of the neighborhood.137 Furthermore, Uptown
and the nearby sections of Edgewater, West Ridge, and Rogers
Park were located on an elevated line which ran through to
downtown Chicago. The public transportation connections in
the area made employment opportunities and services
available elsewhere highly accessible.

The bulk of Vietnamese refugees coming to Chicago in
the mid-1970s were resettled in Uptown. Conditions in the
neighborhood were far from ideal. Drug addicts, gangs, and
prostitutes hung out in properties owned by absentee
landlords. Some refugee families with children shared
apartment buildings with alcoholics, and mentally ill street
people. The largest apartment complexes were the most
dangerous. Refugees were frequently robbed in the
stairwells, lobbies, and courtyards of certain notorious
Uptown buildings. The crime situation was so threatening
that Vietnamese refugees were compelled to form their own
informal security teams. Two Vietnamese informants described the "ambush strategy" developed by refugee residents in the mid-to-late 1970s. Vietnamese men organized "ambush committees" to catch robbers. A woman acted as bait and walked alone on a crime-ridden block. When a robber started to follow the intended victim, refugees watching from one property signaled other apartment buildings. When the robber grabbed for the purse with phony money inside, Vietnamese citizen's patrols came from all directions and held the criminal until police arrived. The police were supportive of the activities of the ambush committees and crime decreased as word went around that the supposedly vulnerable refugees were actively defending themselves with the cooperation of the police.\(^{139}\)

Crime was not the only hardship faced by the many refugees placed in Uptown. Newspaper articles from the mid-to-late 1970s amply describe the highly dilapidated housing in which many Vietnamese were placed. Several of the apartment buildings lacked sufficient heating for the brutally cold Chicago winters.\(^{139}\) Community organizations based in Uptown had been fighting the slumlords in the area since the 1960s. These groups were battling for an adequate supply of decent quality low-income rentals to house the many alcoholics, mentally ill, and very poor persons who were concentrated in Uptown. One particularly militant group, The Heart of Uptown, saw the
large influx of Vietnamese as a threat. The new refugee residents were characterized as a "yellow horde" invasion. The Heart of Uptown brought a lawsuit against the city to stop the resettlement in the neighborhood. Community organizers worried that the incoming refugees would displace poor people and lead to an increase in housing costs.

Prior to the arrival of the Vietnamese, the Heart of Uptown and a few other local organizations had initiated a boycott against some of the worst slumlords. As a result of the boycott, some neighborhood buildings were mostly vacant. The voluntary agencies placed large numbers of refugees in certain boycotted buildings because of the attractive rents which were obviously available. The arrival of the refugees was perceived by some community activists as allowing the slumlords to stay in business. Furthermore, refugees were generally more reliable tenants than other low-income residents looking to live in the area. It was to the financial advantage of absentee landlords to rent extensive quantities of neighborhood housing to resettled Vietnamese.

In response to the tensions, a neighborhood meeting was held with representatives of local community organizations, refugee leaders, and voluntary agency officials. At the meeting, an agreement was made for the voluntary agencies to better coordinate and communicate their resettlement efforts with community groups and neighborhood residents.
The Heart of Uptown and other organizations stopped their active opposition to refugee resettlement, but racial tensions between the Vietnamese, Whites, Blacks, and Hispanics continued.\textsuperscript{141}

Crime, poor housing conditions, and conflict with neighbors and community groups did not dampen the Vietnamese movement into Uptown and nearby neighborhoods of Chicago. The majority of the second wave refugees coming in the late 1970s and early 1980s were placed in these already existing areas of Vietnamese residential concentration. Voluntary agencies continued to believe that new arrivals would adjust easier in an environment with many co-ethnics. Vietnamese and pan-Asian mutual assistance associations were quite active in providing services to refugees in the Uptown area. Secondary migrants initially placed elsewhere in the United States joined family members or friends living on Chicago’s Northside. Several Vietnamese informants had acquaintances who had been placed in suburbs or small towns near Chicago but had later moved to the Uptown vicinity because of loneliness and feelings of isolation.\textsuperscript{142}

Census figures clearly show the predominance of just a few spatially concentrated neighborhoods among Vietnamese residents in 1980. Three Uptown census tracts possessed more than one hundred Vietnamese residents in 1980. The largest tract in the entire city with 539 Vietnamese residents was located in Uptown as was the second largest.
with 238 enumerated. A section of Rogers Park was the only tract outside of Uptown with more than 100 enumerated Vietnamese in 1980. Also noteworthy, was the presence of around 70 Vietnamese in Edgewater and West Ridge tracts just north of Uptown. Miniscule numbers of Vietnamese were scattered in other Northside tracts and throughout the remainder of the city and suburbs. These initial patterns of residence would have a profound influence upon Vietnamese residential patterns and institutional life in subsequent years.
CHAPTER 8
VIETNAMESE RESIDENTIAL SETTLEMENT IN CHICAGO 1985-1994

Uptown and Rogers Park - Vietnamese residential growth in Chicago after the mid-1980s was characterized by the intensification of earlier patterns. The vast majority of Vietnamese residents continued to cluster on the Northside, in Uptown, and adjacent areas. Several factors contributed to the continued growth of Vietnamese residential enclaves in a few Northside neighborhoods. Many existing Vietnamese stayed in the area. A small, but growing number of Vietnamese chose to buy homes in Uptown. By the mid-1980s, an extensive system of Indochinese oriented social services was in place in the neighborhood. A sizable Asian business district had also emerged. The voluntary agencies maintained their policy of placing most of the incoming refugees in Uptown and Rogers Park during the time period. Social supports and familiar consumer goods were easily accessible to recent arrivals placed in the area.
Consequently, hundreds of Amer-Asian refugees from Vietnam were resettled on the Northside after the mid-1980s. Many former reeducation camp detainees were also provided with housing in these same neighborhoods.144

As noted, through the 1980s and early 1990s, many Vietnamese who had become U.S. citizens sponsored the arrival of family members as immigrants. Established Vietnamese living on the Northside were joined by relatives
from overseas, contributing to population growth in existing neighborhoods. Similarly, many members of extended families moved to Uptown after initially being resettled elsewhere, i.e., secondary migration. For these persons, the presence of family members and familiar consumer items provided for a far more hospitable environment than the small towns or suburbs in which they had initially lived. Some secondary migrants moved to the Uptown area even though they did not have relatives or friends living there. A Vietnamese service worker noted that several Amer-Asians resettled in Chicago suburbs later moved to the Northside because of the Vietnamese cultural institutions available there.\textsuperscript{145}

Census figures clearly show the continued concentration of Vietnamese in a few Chicago neighborhoods after 1980. Four Uptown tracts experienced significant increases in Vietnamese residents between 1980 and 1990. The following numbers are taken from these tracts. The 1980 enumerated figure appears first followed by the 1990 tabulation - 121 to 455; 238 to 579; 18 to 137; and 47 to 117. Interestingly, the largest 1980 tract of Vietnamese in Uptown slipped from 569 residents in 1980 to 438 in 1990.\textsuperscript{146} The tract losing numbers is located in the heart of the initial resettlement area. The losses perhaps reflect the continued security problems and dilapidated housing which are associated with much of this tract.
Outside of Uptown, the largest Vietnamese census tract in 1990 was in Rogers Park, which saw an increase from 110 to 210 Vietnamese. Another Rogers Park tract went from 21 to 87 enumerated Vietnamese in the same time period. Rogers Park, at the northeast border of the city, is perceived by many Vietnamese to be somewhat safer from crime compared to the Uptown area. The neighborhood’s older and affordable housing is popular among both Vietnamese renters and homeowners. The proximity of Rogers Park to the Vietnamese business and institutional district in Uptown is also an attraction.

West Ridge and Edgewater - A West Ridge tract, immediately southwest of Rogers Park, saw an increase from 65 to 167 Vietnamese in the 1980s. Housing in this neighborhood holds much of the same lure as that in the area to the northeast. Two Edgewater tracts were also home to notable numbers of enumerated Vietnamese in 1990. The two adjacent tracts immediately north of Uptown possessed a combined 81 Vietnamese in 1980 and 122 a decade later. Edgewater is generally considered to have less crime and higher quality housing than much of Uptown. It is perhaps surprising that more Vietnamese do not live in this section given its proximity to the Vietnamese institutional district just a few blocks south. The gentrification and rising housing values in Edgewater may explain the relatively small numbers of Vietnamese residing there. Housing prices may be
too high in the area for many Vietnamese buying their first home in the United States.\textsuperscript{149}

\textbf{Albany Park} - The only other Chicago tract with a sizable number of Vietnamese in 1990 was located in Albany Park, on the Northwest side of the city. There were 27 enumerated Vietnamese in the area in 1980 and 91 in 1990.\textsuperscript{150} Albany Park is perceived to have cheaper apartments and homes for purchase than some of the gentrifying tracts of Uptown and Edgewater.\textsuperscript{151} This neighborhood is some distance from the other major Vietnamese census tracts but it is still relatively close to stores and services in Uptown. The remainder of the Chicago Vietnamese population is widely scattered in other north and Westside neighborhoods as well as in several suburbs.

The heavy concentration of Vietnamese in a few sections of Chicago raises an interesting question. Has the persistence and intensification of enclave residential patterns helped or hindered the adjustment of the city’s Vietnamese to American society? Informants intimate with Chicago’s Vietnamese community offered opposing views. An ethnic Chinese social service agency administrator stated that many Vietnamese are “stuck” in Uptown. She noted that it is very difficult for many refugees to move out because they are accustomed to quick access to the Vietnamese businesses in the area. Also, there is a sense of comfort because of the large numbers of Vietnamese living nearby.
The administrator observed the negative consequences associated with continued residence in Uptown. She maintained that staying near Uptown slows the acquisition of English and the overall assimilation of sizable numbers of Vietnamese and Southeast Asians. She also noted the continuing high crime rate in the neighborhood. In her opinion, as a result of recent gentrification and real estate speculation in Uptown, better housing values for renters and homeowners may be found in other, relatively safer sections of the city.\textsuperscript{152}

A Vietnamese community leader and service worker argued that the heavy residential concentration in Uptown and adjacent neighborhoods has brought mostly positive benefits to the Vietnamese in Chicago. The dense population of the Vietnamese in the area has allowed for the development of an easily accessible network of co-ethnic social and commercial services. This business and institutional enclave employs many Vietnamese. The same Vietnamese informant noted the important social support functions fulfilled by the agglomeration of co-ethnic people and institutions centered in Uptown. He argued that if many of the Vietnamese had been resettled in other sections of the Chicago region they probably still would not be able to assimilate. Rather, these persons might suffer from mental and psychological problems associated with loneliness and isolation.

According to the informant, Uptown is not considered a
permanent place of residence by most Chicago Vietnamese. He noted that many Vietnamese who initially lived in Uptown have moved out to other Northside neighborhoods or various suburbs.\textsuperscript{153}
Each Dot Represents
One Vietnamese Person

Figure 3. Vietnamese Population, 1990
Chicago by Census Tract
1. Uptown
2. Edgewater
3. West Ridge
4. Rogers Park
5. Albany Park

Figure 4. Neighborhoods of Vietnamese Residents, Chicago.
CHAPTER 9

VIETNAMESE ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE IN CHICAGO

At first glance, the Vietnamese organizational environment in Chicago may appear to be easily characterized. There is one primary Vietnamese mutual assistance association in the Chicago region. The Vietnamese Association of Illinois (VAI) is centered in Uptown and provides extensive services to a sizable clientele. VAI is indeed the major Vietnamese co-ethnic organization in the Chicago metropolitan area and the wider region including Illinois and nearby midwestern states. However, within Uptown itself, several pan-Asian business and service organizations intensely compete for the Indochinese clientele.

The Vietnamese Association of Illinois was founded in 1976 by several Vietnamese who had resettled in Uptown. Initially, the organization operated primarily as a network of individuals who came together for moral support and conducted cultural preservation activities. In 1981, VAI received a federal mutual assistance association demonstration grant. VAI used this funding to establish a center offering services to refugees, including adjustment activities such as document translation and cultural orientation. In the early 1980s, VAI initiated additional programs in employment, education, family counseling, elderly and youth services, as well as small business
development. The organization's newsletter has an estimated mailing list of four thousand persons within the state of Illinois, including many individuals living outside Chicago. VAI has a sizable staff and extensive funding from several public and private sources. The association is one of the best-funded and most active of the more than 20 Asian co-ethnic, pan-Asian, and non-profit refugee assistance agencies operating in Uptown.¹⁹⁶

A Vietnamese Chamber of Commerce is present in Uptown. According to an informant, this group of business persons is relatively inactive. It has functioned primarily as a mechanism for interaction among Vietnamese entrepreneurs, attempting cooperative efforts to limit damaging competition among stores. The informant stated that the chamber is not heavily involved in typical chamber of commerce activities including the promotion of local business. Apparently, the organization is more of a loosely tied mutual group than a formal business association.¹⁹⁷ Uptown also features a Catholic church with Vietnamese services and a Vietnamese Buddhist temple. Undoubtedly, these institutions play important functions in the religious and social life of many Chicago Vietnamese. However, no Chicago informant mentioned these facilities when describing the most active co-ethnic organizations in the city.
The primacy of the Vietnamese Association of Illinois in the local Vietnamese community may be attributed in part, to the residential pattern of dense concentration prevalent in Chicago. Over time, the organization has successfully broadened its funding sources and services. The VAI's headquarters in Uptown is located within the residential foci for the bulk of the Vietnamese living in Chicago. VAI operates in the neighborhood which has emerged as the sole major commercial and institutional center for Vietnamese in the metropolitan area. Even the Vietnamese who live in outlying neighborhoods and suburbs come to Uptown on a regular basis to shop. VAI is easily accessible to most of the Chicago Vietnamese. It should be noted that VAI does not limit its services to co-ethnics. Cambodian, Laotian, and Ethiopian clients living in Uptown also have utilized the agency.  

A Vietnamese employee of a voluntary agency who has worked closely with VAI noted certain distinctive characteristics of the co-ethnic community in Chicago. He stated that Vietnamese leaders in Chicago have worked to achieve a degree of unity and avoid the political divisiveness and power struggles apparent among the Vietnamese in certain other cities. The lack of major competing Vietnamese organizations may be tied to the existence of relative unity among local Vietnamese leaders. However, political differences have been apparent in the
Chicago Vietnamese community as elsewhere. In a heavily publicized incident, the owner of one of the oldest and most popular Vietnamese restaurants in Uptown was "driven" from the city after he was shown on public television meeting with communist government officials during a return to Vietnam. Shortly after the broadcast, the entrepreneur's restaurant was firebombed, as was his home and the Northside apartment building he owned. The apartment building was destroyed and the restaurateur's children narrowly escaped his home by leaping from a second-story balcony. Media reports attributed the attacks to right-wing Vietnamese extremists residing in Chicago. 

In addition to the Vietnamese co-ethnic organizations, several other agencies serve an Indochinese clientele in Uptown. Most of the major voluntary agencies have offices in the neighborhood. Some of the VOLAGS employ Vietnamese staff members and offer special programs targeted to refugees. A variety of pan-Asian groups also operate in the area. Uptown may be described as a heavily competitive arena in which several groups fight for funding and clientele. In order to get a cohesive picture of this organizational environment it will be helpful to briefly describe the other major associations serving Indochinese and the interactions of these agencies with each other as well as the Vietnamese Association of Illinois.
The Southeast Asia Center was founded in the late 1970s as a service agency for ethnic Chinese refugees from Vietnam. In the 1980s, it broadened its operations to provide a variety of educational and cultural programs, as well as free daily meals to members of several Indochinese ethnic groups and non-Asians living in the surrounding area. The staff of the Southeast Asia Center is multi-ethnic. The agency is located adjacent to the Asian business district in Uptown. The Chinese Mutual Aid Association was initially part of the same organization which became the Southeast Asia Center. The two agencies split as a result of political differences related to the Taiwan-Mainland China conflict. Unlike the Southeast Asia Center, which relies heavily upon the contributions of volunteers, Chinese Mutual Aid receives extensive federal funding for refugee assistance activities in Uptown. Chinese Mutual Aid has also broadened its service base to include several ethnic groups of refugees in addition to the ethnic Chinese. According to sources acquainted with the agencies, there is an intense rivalry between the Southeast Asia Center and Chinese Mutual Aid for clients. An employee of the Southeast Asia Center also noted the sometimes bitter competition between her agency and the Vietnamese Association of Illinois, as both organizations provide similar services. There appears to be less of a rivalry between the VAI and Chinese Mutual Aid. An
informant noted the strong working relationship between these two groups.

Asian Human Services is a pan-Asian agency with offices in Uptown. The staff and board of directors of the organization possesses individuals from several Asian ethnic groups as well as other races. The agency provides immigration assistance, language classes, employment training, and other services to a multi-racial service base drawn mostly from the vicinity of Uptown. Employees of Asian Human Services have attempted unsuccessfully to create a coalition of the many Asian agencies in the surrounding area. The goal of such a coalition would be to compete as a united front for sizable grants. Divisions among the organizations including the Southeast Asia Center, Chinese Mutual Aid, VAI, and the Cambodian and Laotian mutual assistance associations undermined the coalition-building efforts.

Another very active agency in Uptown is the Asian-American Small Business Association (AASBA). AASBA was started in the late 1970s by a Chinese-American with the goal of revitalizing the Argyle Street shopping district in Uptown. AASBA has remained an essentially one-man organization, operated by its founder. The director of the agency has been labeled the "Mayor of Argyle Street" by the Chicago media as a result of his extensive activities advocating and promoting the business strip. The AASBA's
achievements have been considerable. The organization's director persuaded the city to spend thousands of dollars to fix cracked sidewalks on Argyle Street. He convinced the Chicago Transit Authority to make millions of dollars in renovations to an elevated subway stop in the heart of the shopping area. The improvements included a landmark pagoda-like structure built by the transit authority at the Argyle station. Since the 1970s, the "Mayor" has cultivated contacts among politicians, and police and sanitation officials for the purpose of improving city services in the business area. Over the time period, Argyle has been transformed from a raunchy strip of taverns, derelicts, and abandoned buildings to a dynamic multi-ethnic Asian shopping area.

The relationship of the Asian-American Small Business Association's director to local Vietnamese leaders has not been particularly close nor warm. AASBA's leader has claimed that Argyle Street is a "New Chinatown" or a "Chinatown North." In the early 1970s, a Chinese entrepreneur attempted unsuccessfully to develop an alternative Chinatown to the traditional Southside Chicago Chinatown in the area. Unlike the old Chinatown, Argyle Street possesses a distinctly Vietnamese character. The majority of the businesses on the strip feature prominent Vietnamese-language signs. The Asian population in the area is predominantly Vietnamese and Cambodian. Most of the
Chinese who live in Uptown are ethnic Chinese from Vietnam. Many Vietnamese object to the "Chinatown" designation for the area because of the strong Vietnamese influence. AASBA's director claims the overwhelming majority of Argyle businesses are owned by Chinese, though most of them are ethnic Chinese from Indochina. AASBA has promoted the business area as a Chinatown in the media. AASBA's Chinese-American leader voiced bitterness over newspaper reports describing the emerging "Little Saigon" in Uptown. He claimed that probably less than 10 percent of the stores on Argyle are owned by native Vietnamese. This figure was disputed by several individuals of various ethnicities who are familiar with the businesses in the area.

The Asian-American Small Business Association's director expressed considerable resentment over the competing business development activities provided by the Vietnamese Association of Illinois. VAI began a Community Economic Development Program (CEDP) in 1984. The CEDP program receives funding from city and federal governmental agencies as well as private foundations. CEDP offers services including business workshops, and technical assistance for refugee entrepreneurs. AASBA's leader claimed that VAI's CEDP program has cut dramatically into his agency's funding from the Chicago Department of Planning and Development, as the city has attempted to equitably divide development resources among the competing groups.
Despite their roles as perhaps the most active economic development organizations in the area, AASBA and VAI have very little interaction with one another.\textsuperscript{143}

In sum, the co-ethnic Vietnamese organizational environment in Chicago is dominated by one centrally located organization which provides many services to an extensive clientele. A sizable number of pan-Asian organizations also exist in the area of major Vietnamese residential concentration. Some of these agencies compete heavily to serve the large clientele of Indochinese refugees living in the area. In business development activities, there is a sharp division between the competing efforts of a Chinese-American run agency and those of the Vietnamese Association. Bitterness on both sides has emerged over the alternative designations of the Argyle shopping area in Uptown as a "Chinatown" as opposed to "Little Saigon". While quite competitive, perhaps the situation in Chicago is not unhealthy. The Vietnamese in this city have access to the activities of a wide array of organizations wishing to provide them services. In addition, several distinct groups are working hard to improve economic and social conditions in the neighborhood.
CHAPTER 10

VIETNAMESE BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT IN CHICAGO

Argyle Street - Since 1975, a cohesive and sizable Vietnamese-oriented business district has emerged in Chicago. Several factors converged to facilitate the development of this impressive Indochinese shopping area in the vicinity of Argyle street in the Uptown neighborhood. As was noted in the previous section, there have been conflicts between competing ethnic organizations over what public name should be used for the dynamic and growing business district. Regardless of whether it is called "New Chinatown," "Chinatown North," "Little Saigon," or the inclusive and multicultural "Asian Village," no one can deny the significant role played by Vietnamese refugees in the transformation of the once blighted area into a bustling commercial strip.

Argyle Street between Broadway and Sheridan Avenue in the heart of Uptown, was quite deteriorated in the mid-1970s. The Argyle strip had a rough image. A dozen bars and liquor stores were the most notable business presence on a street with nearly half of its storefronts vacant. In the 1960s and 1970s public consciousness, Argyle was associated with crime, prostitution, winos, and street people. As mentioned, a powerful entrepreneur from Chicago's traditional Chinatown announced his plan to build a "New Chinatown" on Argyle in the early 1970s. The utopian-like
proposal included a pedestrian mall with pagodas, trees, and reflecting ponds. The Chinese businessman bought a sizable number of storefronts on Argyle. Most of these properties remained vacant and only a few scattered Chinese restaurants set up shop in the area. A viable Chinatown never materialized.

In the late 1970s, a small number of Indochinese entrepreneurs including Vietnamese and ethnic Chinese from Vietnam, began to open small groceries and restaurants on Argyle Street. In the early-to-mid-1980s, several new Indochinese businesses were opening each year on Argyle. By the late 1980s, the once largely vacant shopping strip was almost entirely occupied by active businesses. Perhaps 90 percent of the business enterprises on the street are now owned by persons from Southeast Asia. Most of the old bars and liquor stores have been replaced by stores and restaurants oriented towards the Indochinese market. A street count found nearly 120 visibly Asian businesses on or near Argyle Street. Restaurants and groceries still dominate in the area but the types of businesses have diversified over time. Indochinese photo laboratories, dentists, physicians, insurance agencies, tailors, mortgage companies, exterminators, banks, and hardware stores share Argyle with a wide variety of jewelers, video stores, gift shops, clothing stores, hairdressers, bakeries, pharmacies,
and laundries. There is even a "Vietnam Museum" in the neighborhood.

As available commercial space has evaporated on Argyle, Indochinese businesses have opened on adjacent streets. Sheridan Road, to the east, now features several Asian commercial establishments as does Broadway Avenue, an old commercial corridor to the immediate west of Argyle. In 1993, a new Asian-oriented mall opened on the Broadway Avenue site of an old abandoned car dealership. Eventually, it seems likely that new Southeast Asian business development may transform a sizable section of deteriorated Broadway as it has nearby Argyle.

The remarkable growth and turnaround of the Argyle business area may be partly attributed to its function as the major shopping site for Vietnamese in Chicago. Of all Asian ethnic groups, the Vietnamese clearly are dominant numerically in Uptown and nearby neighborhoods. The Argyle stores, whether owned by ethnic Chinese, Vietnamese, Cambodians, or others, clearly target the Vietnamese market most heavily. The vast majority of the Argyle area businesses feature prominent Vietnamese language storefront signs. Smaller numbers of the commercial enterprises also possess overhead signs in Chinese and Cambodian. Argyle benefits from its status as the only significant area of Vietnamese-oriented business concentration in the entire Chicago metropolitan area. A Vietnamese informant estimated
eighty percent of the Vietnamese businesses in the region are located in the Argyle area. An analysis of the 1993 Vietnamese Business Directory published by the Vietnamese Association of Illinois shows that most of the Vietnamese-owned businesses that are not located in Uptown are widely scattered in nearby Northside neighborhoods. A few Vietnamese-owned businesses also were identified in various suburbs.

The wide variety of Vietnamese-oriented businesses and services available in the vicinity of Argyle contribute to its popularity as a weekend shopping destination for Vietnamese from around Chicago and even other midwestern states. Several informants noted the crowded stores and parking headaches in the area on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays. Vietnamese living in the suburbs, as well as outstate Illinois, Wisconsin, Iowa, Kentucky, Tennessee, Michigan and Indiana come to Argyle to purchase ethnic consumer items. Argyle serves as the sole sizable co-ethnic business and service district not only for Vietnamese in Chicago but also those living throughout the entire midwest region.

The importance of Argyle and its surrounding Uptown as a Vietnamese commercial and institutional district cannot be overstated. However, the vitality of the Argyle business strip is also tied to the patronage of other ethnic groups. Most of the Cambodian-owned businesses in Chicago are
located in Uptown. Only a few Cambodian stores are situated on Argyle. A cluster of a half-dozen Cambodian restaurants, groceries, and video stores has emerged on Leland Avenue, about four blocks south of Argyle near Broadway Avenue. The major Cambodian service agency has offices in the area. The Chicago Cambodian population is heavily concentrated in Uptown and Albany Park to the northwest. Given the presence of co-ethnic businesses as well as those that cater to a broad Southeast Asian market, it is not surprising that the Argyle area also attracts Cambodian shoppers from throughout the Chicago region and surrounding states. The shopping district plays a similar role for Laotians, many of whom reside in the suburb of Elgin, though moderate numbers are also concentrated in Uptown.163

A substantial number of the Argyle customers are Filipinos. The Filipino businesses in Chicago are quite scattered as are the residential locations of this ethnic group. A Filipino social service worker noted the attraction of Argyle to Filipino consumers. Asian food items are available in several sizable grocery stores. In addition, most products are priced lower than in the Southside Chinatown. The Filipino informant stated that the largest group of shoppers on Argyle may be Filipinos from throughout the region.164 Other sources familiar with the business environment on Argyle also noted the heavy
Filipino consumer presence. Interestingly, there are very few Filipino businesses in the area.

Many ethnic Chinese from Indochina are residents of the surrounding neighborhoods and shop in the Argyle stores. In addition, other Chinese with origins in Taiwan, Hong Kong, or Mainland China, also utilize the shopping district for its competitively priced goods. There are also several Vietnamese and ethnic Chinese-owned restaurants on or near Argyle which have attracted a broader clientele of non-Asian Chicago residents. Indeed, the size and diversity of Argyle’s service base is very much a key to its remarkable growth since the late 1970s.

Other explanatory variables for the successful emergence and vitality of the Argyle Southeast Asian businesses relate to the economic development efforts of neighborhood ethnic organizations and recent city investment in the area. As noted, the Asian-American Small Business Association and the Vietnamese Association of Illinois have been active in promoting business development among Asian entrepreneurs in Uptown. Informants acknowledged the contributions of the competing organizations to the area’s business climate. AASBA and its enterprising director have tirelessly promoted Argyle Street winning funding for important improvements including storefront facades, sidewalks, and the local subway station, as well as increased sanitation and police patrol services. The VAI’s
Community Economic Development Program has given technical assistance to several Vietnamese entrepreneurs. Both the AASBA and VAI receive funding from the city Department of Planning and Development. The grants given by the city planning agency and the impressive transit station improvements by the city transit authority are symbols of the city's recognition of the potential for Asian commerce to reinvigorate the area. However, the city's role in the revitalization of Argyle should not be overemphasized. Indeed, relatively few of the refugee entrepreneurs have utilized the technical assistance and loans made possible by city funding, as private sources of capital are preferred. Nevertheless, organizational leaders must be given credit for prodding city officials to provide the resources necessary to improve security, sanitation, and the general appearance of the business district. In spite of their many differences, leaders of the competing organizations are rightfully proud of the transformation and economic vitality on Argyle Street.
CHAPTER 11

CONCLUSION

The Vietnamese residential geography in Philadelphia and Chicago has been strongly influenced by the resettlement choices of voluntary agencies. In Philadelphia, initial neighborhoods of residence were abandoned, in part, because of poor placement decisions. In addition, more recently formed residential concentrations in Kensington and Feltonville owe their existence primarily to VOLAG policies. In Chicago, the present Vietnamese patterns of residence are still tied to a remarkable degree to resettlement placement decisions. Over the years, voluntary agencies in Chicago have placed most Vietnamese refugees in Uptown or nearby neighborhoods. It may be stated that the initial major Vietnamese resettlement site in Chicago developed a momentum as refugees continued to be placed in or migrated to the area. Agglomeration effects occurred. The presence of a large number of Vietnamese in Uptown resulted in the establishment of many co-ethnic institutions. These institutions kept original Vietnamese residents in the vicinity and served to attract additional Vietnamese in subsequent years.

In contrast to Chicago, a critical mass of resettled refugees was never reached in either of the major initial Philadelphia placement neighborhoods. For the Vietnamese, the negative aspects of the original settlement areas far
outweighed any positive features. Vietnamese moved out of these neighborhoods en masse to divergent locations. Today, Philadelphia possesses several widely scattered neighborhoods of Vietnamese concentration. The Vietnamese residents of the city live in distinct areas based upon length of residence in the United States, as well as economic class. Upper Darby, the Italian Market, Olney, and Mount Moriah may be described as homeownership neighborhoods. Homeownership is highly valued as a symbol of status among the Vietnamese. South Seventh Street, Tasker-Morris, Kensington, and Feltonville are primarily inhabited by renters. The rental and homeownership neighborhoods may also be broadly broken down by economic class. Generally, Upper Darby and the Italian Market are the most desirable areas of homeownership. Mount Moriah, and Olney are "starter" neighborhoods. Likewise, Tasker-Morris and Feltonville are considered more attractive places to rent compared to Kensington and South Seventh Street.

The Vietnamese residents of Chicago are not so clearly separated along class lines. Veteran residents and relative newcomers reside together in Uptown. A number of upwardly mobile Vietnamese have moved from Uptown in order to buy homes in the Northside neighborhoods of Edgewater, West Ridge, Rogers Park, and Albany Park. Other Vietnamese homeowners have moved into widely scattered suburbs. However, the most notable aspect of the Chicago Vietnamese
community is its relative geographic cohesion and lack of dispersion.

The Vietnamese organizational structure in the two cities parallels the residential geography. Philadelphia lacks the strong Vietnamese organization with a metropolitan-wide service base which exists in Chicago. The geographic concentration of the Vietnamese in Chicago has served to promote the activities of one monolithic co-ethnic organization. This situation is quite a contrast to Philadelphia where co-ethnic and pan-Asian agencies have arisen to meet the localized needs of dispersed Vietnamese residential neighborhoods. However, the organizational environment in Chicago is complicated by the existence of several pan-Asian groups competing to attract clients from the many refugee and immigrant groups who live in the area of primary Vietnamese concentration. Consequently, the Vietnamese in Chicago have access to a wide array of social services targeted towards them by non-profit agencies.

In Philadelphia, the absence of strong Vietnamese service organizations has been filled by the activities of Catholic parish-based programs. Two agencies operated by Vietnamese Catholic priests serve hundreds of co-ethnics. The church-operated programs are the most extensively used by Vietnamese in the metropolitan area. Despite their heavy utilization, the parish programs mostly serve residents of their respective neighborhoods. Truly, the organizational
environments in Philadelphia and Chicago are strongly tied to the residential patterns of dispersion and concentration prevailing in the two cities.

Vietnamese business development in Philadelphia contrasts sharply to that observed in Chicago. Philadelphia has a few sites of Vietnamese-oriented commercial enterprises which attract co-ethnics from throughout the metropolitan area. Hoa Binh Plaza - a mini-mall, Chinatown, and to a lesser extent, the Italian Market area stores on South Eighth Street, serve as primary shopping areas. Other limited concentrations of Vietnamese businesses may be found in the major scattered sites of residential concentration including Logan, South Seventh Street, Tasker-Morris, Mount Moriah, and Kensington. By contrast, in Chicago there exists a single extensive shopping district situated in the area of primary Vietnamese residential concentration. Eighty percent of co-ethnic businesses in Chicago are located near Argyle Street in the Uptown neighborhood. The Chicago shopping district attracts Vietnamese consumers from throughout Chicago and its suburbs as well as surrounding states.

The residential geography in Chicago has contributed to the concentrated nature of Vietnamese enterprise in the city. To a certain degree, the Argyle Street shopping district fits the Portes definition of an ethnic enclave. There are more than 100 businesses owned by Vietnamese and
ethnic Chinese from Vietnam in the area. There is a wide diversity in the types of business enterprises. The "institutional completeness" available in Uptown has helped it to retain and attract Vietnamese residents. Furthermore, the restaurants and groceries have effectively carved out a niche serving a broad base of Asians and non-Asians alike. The co-ethnic businesses and institutions in Uptown undoubtedly employ many Vietnamese residents, but the extent of economic integration among the firms is unclear.

While the Vietnamese business district in Chicago may perhaps qualify for ethnic enclave status in some respects, it is quite clear that none of the major shopping sites in Philadelphia would. Hoa Binh Plaza consists of only 13 stores. The mall is owned by a Chinese-American developer. The complex may be quite popular among Vietnamese throughout the Philadelphia region, but it is certainly not "institutionally complete". A grocery, a few restaurants, a clothing store, a hair dresser, and a video store do not come close to meeting the total needs of co-ethnic consumers. Given its limited size and functions, the mall would not satisfy the other demands of Portes’s model. Philadelphia’s Chinatown is utilized by many Vietnamese. The neighborhood may or may not qualify as an ethnic enclave. However, most of the businesses and residents of Chinatown are of Chinese, rather than Vietnamese, extraction. Obviously with its relatively small number of
Vietnamese enterprises and employees, Chinatown certainly could not be considered a Vietnamese business enclave.

The South Eighth Street businesses are too limited in number, diversity, and clientele to meet the guidelines of the enclave model. The same may be said for each of the neighborhood-based Vietnamese business areas in Philadelphia. The total number of Vietnamese commercial enterprises in Philadelphia closely approximates the Chicago figure, but the businesses are widely scattered, strongly contrasting with the business environment observable in Chicago.

In sum, the Vietnamese community in Philadelphia appears in many respects to be highly fractionalized in comparison to Chicago’s relative cohesiveness. It may be asked, what impact do these differences have upon the lives of Vietnamese residents in the respective cities? Does one of the cities possess a preferable pattern of development? The Vietnamese in Philadelphia live in varying neighborhoods depending upon their social class and length of residence in the United States. Most co-ethnic organizations and businesses serve the residents of distinct areas. By contrast, one may generalize that the Chicago Vietnamese have formed their own extensive ethnic neighborhood while those in Philadelphia have assimilated to a greater degree, utilizing a variety of residential options less tied to the presence of nearby cultural supports.
Precise data comparing the economic fortunes of the Philadelphia Vietnamese to those in Chicago is not available. A sizable number of Vietnamese in both cities have made substantial economic progress since arriving as refugees. In each city, there is also a portion of the population which has not fared as well. Many arrivals after the mid-1980s, especially, did not experience the same pace of mobility as their predecessors. Perhaps there are better social supports for refugee newcomers with meager resources in Chicago's "institutionally complete" Uptown compared to some of Philadelphia's refugee neighborhoods. One is struck with the relative egalitarianism apparent in Uptown where Vietnamese who came 15 years ago live side by side with recent arrivals. In Philadelphia, there are stark contrasts between the low-income Vietnamese residential concentrations in Kensington and South Seventh Street compared to the middle-class neighborhoods of Upper Darby and the Italian Market. It should be mentioned however, that certain Chicago informants believed that many Vietnamese are "stuck" in Uptown. This community’s sense of cultural security possibly holds back mobility into other potential neighborhoods of residence. In Philadelphia, the great majority of Vietnamese with improving economic resources move to clearly identifiable areas, mostly in outlying areas. This holds true to in Chicago, but to a much lesser extent.
It is my belief that it is not possible to label the structure of community development in either city as preferable to the other. There are strengths to each model. The evidence provided shows the diverse modes of adaption the Vietnamese have made to life in distinct American cities. The Vietnamese response to places such as Uptown, Tasker-Morris, and Kensington is truly inspirational. In these inner city neighborhoods, the Vietnamese have created their own business enterprises and rehabilitated old shopping strips. While conditions are less than ideal in either city, one must be impressed with the progress the Vietnamese have made in improving their situation in both cities since arriving in very difficult circumstances.

Several avenues for possible future research flow from these findings. Obviously, the residential experience of Indochinese refugees has been somewhat unique compared to other immigrants in American society. Many Vietnamese were resettled in communities not of their own choosing. It would be interesting to compare the long-term Vietnamese residential patterns to those of other non-refugee immigrant groups. As a result of resettlement practices, are the Vietnamese more or perhaps less spatially concentrated in many American cities than other immigrants who arrived in the same time period?

Extensive study could be made of inter-group relations between the Vietnamese and their neighbors. What are the
characteristics of neighborhoods where significant inter-group conflict has occurred? How could group relations be improved in areas with many Indochinese? How might resettlement community preparation practices of VOLAGS be improved for the future placement of incoming refugees? Other research could be done upon the economic impact of emerging Vietnamese business districts upon older urban neighborhoods. Should city planners in places such as Philadelphia target resources to Southeast Asian refugee entrepreneurs as has occurred in Chicago? Finally, case studies of residential patterns, co-ethnic organizations, and business development in other major sites of Vietnamese concentration are needed. Is Philadelphia's model of dispersion or Chicago's spatial concentration more common? Or quite possibly, are other models of community development prevalent based upon the unique circumstances experienced in a given city of residence?
ENDNOTES


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8. Thuy 104, 106.


11. Thuy 105.

12. Strand and Jones 36.


15. Strand and Jones 35.

17. Thuy 111, 115.

18. Kibria 77.


21. Strand and Jones 33.

22. Strand and Jones 33, 40.

23. Strand and Jones 40.

24. Strand and Jones 41.


26. Strand and Jones 41.


28. Strand and Jones 41-42.

29. Vinh 32.

30. Thuy 105-06.

31. Strand and Jones 46-47.

32. Thuy 106.

33. Portes and Rumbaut 52.

34. Strand and Jones 42-43.

35. Vinh 33-36.

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37. Thuy 117.
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40. Indra 183.
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45. Thuy 115.
46. ORR, Southeast Asian Youth 14-15.


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55. Portes and Jensen 768.
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60. Gold 173-74.
61. Gold 176.
62. Gold 177, 183-84.
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64. Gold 178.
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68. Gold 188-89.
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71. Strand and Jones 28.
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73. Strand and Jones 30.
74. Gold 189.
75. Gold 192.


77. ORR, Southeast Asian Youth 12.
78. Strand and Jones 149-59.
80. ORR, Southeast Asian Youth, 12.


85. Brynner Interview.

86. ORR, *Southeast Asian Youth* 14-15.


88. ORR, *Southeast Asian Youth* 14.

89. Brynner interview.


96. Pham interview.


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107. Quinn Interview.
112. Knight interview.
114. Ho interview.
116. Pham interview.
117. Pham interview.
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