

THE ORIGINS AND DETERMINANTS OF INDOCHINESE

SECONDARY IN-MIGRATION TO S.W. KANSAS

by

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Over 700,000 Indochinese refugees have been resettled in the U.S. since 1975. Despite the initial resettlement efforts at dispersing the refugees throughout the U.S., the secondary migration process has resulted in the refugee population's becoming increasingly concentrated in the western United States.¹ The principal recipient of these secondary migrants has been the state of California. By the end of 1984, California contained approximately 40 percent of all Indochinese refugees who had been admitted into the U.S.

Kansas' Indochinese refugee population has fluctuated during the 1980s. Between 1982 and 1983, the proportion of the total refugee population residing within the state declined from 1.5 to 1.3 percent. Between 1983 and 1984, the proportion of refugees residing within the state remained unchanged; however, their numbers increased by 600 to an estimated statewide total of 9,400.² Part of this increase is attributable to interstate secondary migration to the western Kansas communities of Garden City, Dodge City, and Liberal. All three communities have populations of less than 25,000 and are relatively isolated. The two principal cities within a radius of 250 miles of the center of this region are Denver and Wichita. Despite this relative isolation and the rural character of western Kansas, the population of Indochinese refugees within the region has increased from approximately 100 in 1980 to about 4,000 by 1985.³ This sudden influx of refugees to an isolated rural area is relatively unusual in that most of the Indochinese secondary migration has been to California--the most urbanized state in the country. Nevertheless, the size and suddenness of the refugee immigration to western Kansas suggests that other rural areas could be subject to the same phenomenon and that, therefore, the present study may be considered representative of this type of in-migration. The purpose of this article is to explain the reasons behind the immigration of secondary migrants and document the extent of Garden City's refugee in-migration field.

Little attention has been given to the subject of Indochinese secondary refugee migration to small towns. Indeed, most research that has examined the issue of secondary migration among Indochinese refugees has been completed at the national level and has been concerned with explaining their migration patterns within a traditional push-pull framework.⁴ Desbarats, for example, found secondary immigrants moving to states with high per capita incomes, high welfare payments, lenient public-assistance eligibility requirements, low unemployment and a warm climate.⁵ However, there has been no consideration of the spatial characteristics of the refugees' migrant flows. This omission can, in part, be attributed to the difficulty of applying conventional

migration theory to the refugee population. For example, according to Baker and North, 47 percent of the 1975 arrivals lived in a different state from their initial placement.⁶ This high rate of interstate migration is in direct contrast with the rest of the United States' population. During the period 1975 to 1978, for example, only 6 percent of the U.S. population were involved in interstate moves, while the majority of moves occurred within the same county.⁷ The latter predominate, in part, because of the various constraints on long-distance moves, such as transportation costs, the psychic costs of moving, the loss of earnings while unemployed during a move and the uncertainty about income prospects due to a lack of information.⁸ However, the propensity for interstate migration among the refugee population suggests that they are not affected by any of the above constraints. Indeed, many of them were not placed in their community of choice, and so there are few psychic costs incurred in a subsequent move. Moreover, many of the refugees are initially unemployed, and so there is no loss of earnings associated with a move. As a result, it is suggested that distance has little effect upon the refugee's destination selection. This general proposition is examined within the context of refugee in-migration to Garden City. Of the three western Kansas communities which have received Indochinese refugees, Garden City has received approximately half of them, and, therefore, it provides the largest and most suitable data source.

Indochinese Refugee Secondary Migration

The initial placement of refugees was largely determined by the refugees' own preference and by the availability of sponsorships in particular communities. Sponsorships, according to Forbes, were most available in metropolitan areas; in places with large Asian populations and activist churches; near U.S. military installations; near government offices and industries with prior experience in Vietnam; and in communities that were close to the four major refugee processing centers (Fort Pendleton, California; Fort Chaffee, Arkansas; Fort Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania; and Elgin Air Force Base, Florida).⁹ However, as was previously noted, only 47 percent of the 1975 entrants were resettled in their place of choice, and, as a result, widespread secondary migration has since occurred. The principal destination of these and other secondary migrants is California, which has increased its share of the nationwide total of Indochinese refugees from 22 percent in 1975 to 40 percent in 1984.

The second groups of refugees, who began entering the U.S. in 1979, forced a modification in the initial resettlement program. Whereas in 1975 there had been no Indochinese population in the U.S., by 1979 there was an existing population base, and many of the new arrivals were hoping to be reunited with other family members already living in the United States. However, some communities with large concentrations of refugees were experiencing adverse impacts, such as the overloading of social services and high unemployment rates among the refugees. The Office of Refugee Settlement (O.R.R.) sought to reconcile its policy of family

reunification with the interests of local communities by introducing a program in 1982 which restricted settlement in impacted areas to the immediate family members of refugees already residing in these areas. A preliminary study by O.R.R. found that the degree of secondary migration among refugees resettled under this program was less than that of earlier cohorts. Nevertheless, California remained the principal destination of those refugees who moved.¹⁰

Apart from macro-level research aimed at explaining interstate secondary migration patterns, little is known about the determinants of in-migration to small towns. According to Desbarats' aggregate-level study of secondary interstate in-migration in 1980, refugees responded primarily to economic incentives and moved to states with high per capita incomes, low unemployment, high AFDC payments and lenient welfare eligibility requirements.¹¹ Forbes also notes the importance of economic factors in explaining increased secondary migration to California since 1982.¹² In 1982, the federal government changed the regulations regarding refugees' eligibility for cash and medical assistance, by reducing the period of time during which refugees benefited from a waiver of family compensation requirements from 36 months to 18 months. Many refugees who lost their eligibility for assistance under this change responded by migrating to California in order to gain better benefits.

Although Desbarats' and Forbes's findings would appear to support the notion of the refugees as "rational utility maximizing individuals," it is also important to acknowledge the primacy of the extended family in facilitating the refugees' economic and emotional adjustment to the host society. Indeed, the presence of the extended family is regarded as crucial in assisting in the process of refugee adjustment.¹³ Moreover, refugees' knowledge of alternative settlement opportunities in other communities is likely to be provided by relatives already residing in those communities. As a result, it is suggested that some secondary migrants' reasons for moving are likely to be related both to economic and family reunification factors and that frequently these two factors are coincidental.

Surveys of Indochinese secondary migrants and their reasons for moving also emphasize the importance of economic and family reunification factors in determining their choice of destination. A study of 1,200 Indochinese refugees who had moved to Orange County, California, found that 20 percent of respondents gave employment as their reason for moving, while the equivalent figure for family reunification was 19 percent; however, the most common reason was climate (39 percent).¹⁴ Similar findings were also reported by Desbarats.¹⁵ The importance of climate in determining in-migration may, however, reflect local conditions. Climatic considerations, for example, are unlikely to be as important in determining in-migration to areas characterized by temperature extremes, such as those found in continental-type climatic areas.

Despite the previously mentioned attempts at explaining refugee in-migration, little consideration has been given to the spatial characteristics of refugee in-migration patterns.

Conventional migration theory, in the form of the gravity model, would predict that since most people migrate short distances, Garden City's in-migration field would consist primarily of hinterland migrants.¹⁶ The basis for the gravity model is that migration between any two places is considered to be a function of the distance between them and their population size. An increase in distance from a town leads to a reduction in knowledge concerning opportunities within it and also increases the costs of migration, thereby reducing migration. Empirical support for this process among internal migrants within the United States is provided by Gallaway et al.¹⁷ and Greenwood and Gormely.¹⁸ The distance constraint on knowledge and migration costs can, however, be overcome by channelized or chain migration, according to MacDonald and MacDonald,¹⁹ and Roseman.²⁰ This type of migration occurs primarily through interpersonal contact and is normally observed between small rural areas and a particular city. Neither hinterland nor chain migration are, however, appropriate in understanding a refugee in-migration field. Many of the refugees were not resettled in their place of choice, and as a result their distribution of contacts in the form of relatives and friends is unlikely to have any relationship to any distance decay pattern. Furthermore, chain migration occurs over time between established communities; most Indochinese, by contrast, have been in the United States eleven years or less and are still in the process of reestablishing communities. Empirical studies of refugee in-migration patterns are rare; nevertheless, Forbes's observations concerning the pull of California's welfare benefits suggests that distance is not a constraint for many of that state's secondary in-migrants.²¹ As a result it is suggested that a distance decay pattern will be absent from Garden City's in-migration field; instead, the in-migration field will be characterized by a diverse number of origins reflecting the initial efforts at dispersing the refugees.

In summary, previous research at the interstate level indicates that high per capita incomes, the availability of high welfare benefits and family reunification are the prime determinants of secondary in-migration. Furthermore, due to the resettlement policy of refugee dispersal, it is suggested that distance will not be a constraint on the refugees' secondary migration, and, therefore, it will have little effect on the spatial structure of a town's in-migration field. The applicability of these general propositions to Garden City will be examined in subsequent sections.

Data

The data for this study are derived from a survey of the Indochinese population in Garden City in June 1984, sponsored by the U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement. Its goal was to enumerate the refugee population. Trained surveyors from the refugee community were each assigned a quadrant within Garden City, and they conducted a door-to-door survey of the residents in each district. Table 1 lists the variables obtainable from the survey. In order to facilitate the cooperation of the refugee community in completing the survey, the plans for the survey were announced on the local

Vietnamese cable television program. In addition, signs announcing the survey and requesting that those persons not enumerated should contact the surveyors were placed in local Asian stores and in the major factories. All participants in the survey were assured of the confidentiality of their responses and that none of the information they provided would be made available on an individual basis to any governmental agency.

Table 1

| Data Obtainable from the 1984 Survey of Southeast Asians | |
|--|-----------------------------|
| Sex | Country of birth |
| Religion | Date entered the U.S. |
| Date of Birth | Year of move to Garden City |
| Employer | Place of last residence |
| Occupation in home country before 1975 | Spouse's residence |

A total of 943 refugees were enumerated: 855 Vietnamese, 45 Cambodians and 44 Laotians. It is widely recognized within the community that this figure represents an undercount of the total refugee population. Surveyors reported that some refugees refused to answer the questions out of fear that the information could somehow be used against them. Despite the omission of these data, it is considered unlikely that this will result in an alteration of the in-migration pattern. Six hundred and eighty-three of the town's refugee population were secondary migrants, i.e., they formerly resided in another community within the United States (Table 2). All three

Table 2
Characteristics of Garden City's
Indochinese Refugee Population

| | Origin Group | | |
|-------------------------------|--------------|-----------|---------|
| | Vietnamese | Cambodian | Laotian |
| 1984 population | 855 | 45 | 42 |
| Born in Garden City | 74 | 26 | 9 |
| Moved directly to Garden City | 96 | 0 | 0 |
| Secondary migrants | 631 | 19 | 32 |
| Missing cases ¹ | 53 | 0 | 1 |
| Mean age (in years) | 18.3 | 17.8 | 24.1 |
| % male | 61.0 | 53.3 | 76.0 |

¹Includes those persons who gave post office box numbers as addresses within Garden City.

Source: 1984 Survey of Indochinese Refugees in Garden City.

origin groups' secondary migrants are characterized by their youthfulness, with the Vietnamese having the youngest mean age of 20 (Table 3). The Vietnamese and Laotians also have a disproportionate number of males among their populations.

Both these characteristics are, however, representative of the national Indochinese refugee population.

Table 3
Characteristics of Garden City's Indochinese
Secondary Migrant Population

| | Origin Group | | | All Groups |
|---------------------|--------------|-----------|---------|---------------|
| | Vietnamese | Cambodian | Laotian | |
| 1984 Population | 632 | 19 | 32 | 683 |
| Mean age (in years) | 20.1 | 22.5 | 26.7 | 20.5 |
| % male | 64 | 53 | 73 | 64 |

Source: 1984 Survey of Indochinese Refugees in Garden City.

Indochinese In-migration to Western Kansas

Previous research has indicated the importance of high per capita incomes, high welfare benefits, family reunification and climate in explaining refugee secondary in-migration. In the case of Garden City, the sudden refugee in-migration is largely explained by the opening in 1981 of Iowa Beef Packers' (I.B.P.) beef processing plant in Holcomb, situated seven miles west of Garden City. Two years later, another beef processing plant, belonging to the Val Agri company, opened two miles east of Garden City. Prior to the opening of the I.B.P. plant, the number of secondary migrants in the town was 10; by 1982, this figure had increased to 381, and by 1984 the population had reached 683 (Table 4). Additional evidence to link the opening of the plants with the refugee in-migration is provided by (a) the Indochinese employment structure, (b) the low level of unemployment among the secondary in-migrants, and (c) the low incidence of welfare payments among the in-migrants.

Table 4
Number of Indochinese Secondary In-migrants to Garden City
by Year of Entry and Origin Group

| Year | Origin Group | | | Total Population |
|---------|--------------|-----------|---------|------------------|
| | Vietnamese | Cambodian | Laotian | |
| 1975-80 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 10 |
| 1981 | 77 | 0 | 0 | 87 |
| 1982 | 274 | 9 | 11 | 381 |
| 1983 | 132 | 9 | 16 | 538 |
| 1984* | 139 | 1 | 5 | 683 |

*Includes only the first half of 1984.

Source: 1984 Survey of Indochinese Refugees in Garden City.

The importance of the two beef processing plants in providing employment among the in-migrants is illustrated by Table 5. Over 80 percent of adult males were employed by either I.B.P. or Val Agri; among females the corresponding

figure was 50 percent. Two other beef processing plants, National Beef, located in Liberal, and Kansas Beef, located in Dodge City, also employed a small number of refugees. Indeed, among males, after excluding students and unemployed persons, only about 6 percent were employed in jobs unrelated to the beef processing industry. Moreover, only 4 percent of males and 10 percent of females reported being unemployed, and since, of these persons, 58 percent entered Garden City in 1984, this cannot be considered part of a long-term unemployment problem. These low levels of unemployment indicate that the prospect of employment in one of the beef processing plants is a major factor in the secondary migrant's decision to migrate to Garden City. These low levels of unemployment are also associated with a low incidence of welfare payments. In the fall of 1985, the Kansas Department of Social and Rehabilitative Services reported that out of an estimated Indochinese refugee population of 4,000 in southwestern Kansas, there were only 70 refugees receiving welfare payments. This low level reflects both the refugees' desire to work and the relative difficulty of obtaining welfare within Kansas.²²

Table 5
Employment Structure of Adult* Indochinese
Secondary Migrants, Garden City, 1984
(Figures in %)

| Employer | Males | Females |
|----------------------------|--------|---------|
| I.B.P. | 77.00 | 50.00 |
| Val Agri | 8.33 | 4.20 |
| National Beef | .66 | .70 |
| Others ¹ | 4.33 | 5.80 |
| Homemaker | | 17.60 |
| Student | 4.66 | 5.60 |
| Unemployed | 4.00 | 9.80 |
| Missing Cases ² | 1.00 | 6.30 |
| TOTAL | 100.00 | 100.00 |
| n | 300 | 142 |

*Adult defined as 18 years or older in 1984.

¹Others category includes: Cessna, Panhandle steel, School District, St. Catherine's Hospital, Catholic Church, Kansas S.R.S., and Self-employed.

²This category includes those persons who failed to report an occupation.

The preceding clearly indicates the importance of the beef processing industry in attracting Indochinese secondary migrants to Garden City and suggests that without this industry the sudden in-migration would not have occurred. There is, however, no tangible evidence to indicate the reasons for the in-migration of those ten secondary migrants who arrived in Garden City prior to 1981. Overall, these results are supportive of previous aggregate-level analyses of refugee secondary in-migration. The prime determinant of the in-migration to Garden City has been the availability of employment at the beef packing plants. There is, however, no evidence to indicate that welfare benefits and their

availability have had any effect on most migrants' decisions to move to Garden City.

Garden City's In-migration Field

Since the majority of internal migration occurs over short distances, most towns' in-migration would be expected to be dominated by hinterland migrants. However, given the propensity for interstate migration among the Indochinese refugees and the refugee resettlement policy of dispersal, it is suggested that the in-migration fields of towns receiving an influx of these refugees will be characterized by a diverse number of sources. In examining this proposition, we will compare Garden City's Indochinese refugee in-migration field for the 1981-84 period with its in-migration field for the 1975-80 period, prior to the influx of refugees. Clearly, it would have been preferable to compare in-migration fields for the same time period; unfortunately, there are no comparative data for nonrefugee in-migrants in the early 1980s. Despite this apparent weakness, it is important to acknowledge the relative stability of in-migration fields over time, and, therefore, no substantial differences in nonrefugee in-migrant scores would be expected between the two time periods.²³

As expected, the majority (58 percent) of in-migrants to the town during the 1975-80 period came from the town's immediate hinterland, Finney County, the county in which Garden City is located (Table 6). By contrast, none of the

Table 6
Garden City's 1975-80 In-migration Field vs. Its 1981-84
Indochinese Refugee In-migration Field
(Figures in %)

| Source* | 1975-80 In-migrants | 1981-84 In-migrants |
|---------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| Finney County | 58.5 | 0.0 |
| Kansas | 20.2 | 56.2 |
| (Wichita) | (n.d.) | (47.0) |
| Northeast | .1 | 6.1 |
| Northcentral | 6.7 | 7.8 |
| South | 6.0 | 14.9 |
| West | 8.5 | 14.9 |
| TOTAL | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| n | 9,831 | 683 |

*Divisions conform to 1980 Census definitions.

Source: General Social and Economic Characteristics, Kansas, Table 156, U.S. Bureau of the Census; 1984 Survey of Indochinese Refugees in Garden City.

1981-84 Indochinese in-migrants formerly resided in Finney County; instead, the majority of them have their origins in other towns in Kansas--most notably Wichita, 215 miles to the east. This difference is clearly attributable to the refugee resettlement policy. Rural Finney County, because of its isolation and lack of nonfarm employment opportunities, is an

unlikely place to attract the sponsorship of refugees, and so there were no refugees to move from the county to Garden City with the opening of the plants. Wichita, by contrast, attracted refugee sponsors by virtue of its possessing a major U.S. military installation (McConnell Air Force Base) and its being the largest city in the state. These two factors combined to support the largest refugee population base within the state, some of whom have subsequently moved to Garden City.

Another major difference between the two groups' in-migration fields concerns the proportion and sources of interstate in-migrants. Forty-four percent of the Indochinese in-migrants are from out of state, while the equivalent figure for the nonrefugees is 21.3 percent. Moreover, 6 percent of the Indochinese in-migrants are from the Northeast, and nearly 15 percent are from the South, while the equivalent figures for the nonrefugees are 0.1 and 6.0 respectively. These differences serve to emphasize the higher incidence of interstate migration among the refugees and that distance is less of a constraint on their destination selection than it is for the rest of the population. However, it is also important to acknowledge that there are differences in the extent of in-migration fields between Indochinese groups (Table 7). Cambodians had the smallest in-migration field, with 90 percent of their in-migrants moving from Wichita; the corresponding figures for Vietnamese and Laotians are 47 percent and 25 percent respectively. The Laotians and Vietnamese have different in-migration fields, with the majority of Laotians moving to Garden City from the northcentral region (principally Illinois), while Wichita

Table 7
Garden City's 1981-84 Indochinese In-migration Field
by Different Origin Groups
(Figures in %)

| Source | Vietnamese | Cambodian | Laotian |
|---------------|------------|-----------|---------|
| Finney County | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 |
| Kansas | 56.6 | 89.5 | 28.1 |
| (Wichita) | (46.8) | (89.5) | (25.0) |
| Northeast | 5.6 | 0.0 | 0.0 |
| Northcentral | 5.4 | 10.5 | 53.1 |
| South | 16.0 | 0.0 | 3.1 |
| West | 15.3 | 0.0 | 15.6 |
| TOTAL | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| n | 632 | 19 | 32 |

Source: 1984 Survey of Indochinese Refugees in Garden City.

provided the majority of Vietnamese in-migrants. These differences serve to emphasize the role of the resettlement policy in establishing a dispersed population base from which subsequent migration has since occurred. The results also illustrate the difficulty of applying conventional models of migration behavior to refugee flows.

Conclusion

The primary reason for the sudden in-migration of Indochinese refugees to Garden City is the opening of the beef packing plants. Prior to 1981, there were only ten secondary refugee in-migrants residing in the community; a year after I.B.P. opened its facility in Holcomb, this figure had increased to 381. Unlike previous studies, albeit at the state level, there is no evidence to indicate that welfare payments and lenient eligibility requirements were a factor in most migrants' decision to move to Garden City.

Garden City's refugee in-migration field, in contrast with its nonrefugee in-migration field, was characterized by long-distance moves. Only 21 percent of nonrefugee in-migrants were from out of state, while the corresponding figure for the Indochinese is 44 percent, with the remainder coming from Wichita, over 200 miles away. The predominance of such long-distance moves supports the view that distance is less of a constraint on refugees' destination selection than it is for the rest of the population. The propensity for such moves is a reflection of the refugee resettlement policy of dispersal and the fact that many of the refugees have yet to establish ties to a specific community. Moreover, these results also indicate that such traditional models of migration behavior as the gravity model are inappropriate in predicting the size and extent of a town's refugee in-migration field.

NOTES

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