

Book Reviews

**Louis-Jacques Dorais,
Kwok B. Chan and
Doreen M. Indra, editors**
*Ten Years Later:
Indochinese Communities
in Canada*
Montreal: Canadian Asian
Studies Association, 1988

Reviewed by Howard Adelman

Ten Years Later is a successor to Chan and Indra's edited volume entitled *Uprooting, Loss and Adaptation* published by the Canadian Mental Health Association (reviewed in *Refuge*, Vol. 7, No. 4); the latter dealt with adaptation from an individual perspective. The articles in *Ten Years Later* are organized geographically and deal with the collective life of the Southeast Asian communities of Victoria, Lethbridge, Winnipeg, Toronto, the National Capital Region, Montreal, Quebec City and Southeast New Brunswick. They are intended to serve a practical role in guiding government policy as well as to assist the various Indochinese communities to preserve and reinforce their cultural identities.

As Jean Burnet noted in her Preface, the Southeast Asian refugees provide a fascinating case study of immigrant, more particularly, refugee adaptation, not simply because of the drama and trauma of their exodus, but because of the diversity within the group, their widespread dispersion and the unique policies then in place in Canada which played a role in their adaptation – namely the private sponsorship programme for refugees and the new multicultural policies of Canada.

The first chapter by Buchignani diverges from the others. It is not itself a community study but an attempt to synthesize data in order to develop a model of both contemporary Southeast Asian family and community organization. More than that, it is a plea for less ad hoc research and for more systematic and focused studies to test theoretical models.

Buchignani divides the problem into three areas: the study of families, informal

community organizations and institutional community organizations. In each case he uses a structural-functional methodology to examine the research data available. The structural studies reinforce the impression that Indochinese families are extended, patrilineal, patriarchal and patrilocal; they are not typical nuclear Western families. However, like all other immigrant groups who have come to Canada, the family structure is in transition. While still patriarchal and patrilineal, it is developing into a nuclear or only partially extended model. Men are becoming more marginalized in the family than women. In part, this transition is a result of the normal economic and social forces in Canada. The transition, however, has been affected by the degree to which Southeast Asian refugees were able to leave Southeast Asia with other family members and remain together where they resettled, or were able to assist other members to leave Southeast Asia subsequently.

Buchignani does not disagree with the universal assumption that the family is critical in providing socio-psychological support. However, the studies provide little in the way of hard data to support viewing the family as an emotional support system nor is there any programmatic benefit. He favours an empirical study based on considering the family as an economic unit. Operating from a position of relative deprivation, family members pool their resources to survive in a highly competitive situation. This, he argues, would yield better results in understanding the dynamic of the transition of a family towards a nuclear character. Further, the social function of the family in the interface with the host society needs further study.

Patters of strong ethnic-exclusive identity give rise to questions about the mixture of factors reinforcing such relationships – Canadian multicultural policies, societal racism, defence against downward economic mobility, cultural linguistic and social barriers against integration into the host community, cultural values (taboos against extra-ethnic marriages). Further, what are the functions of such strong ethnic identities with respect to entrée to the economic sector, the government bureaucracy, education, in addition to the assumed functions of providing

a sense of place, stability and order, a social milieu, a source of recognition and value reinforcement? What structural patterns predominate? Are they most influenced by place of origin, religion or current functional roles?

Finally, Buchignani explores the role of formal community organizations and institutions – religious, cultural, social as well as business institutions providing goods and services. He concurs with the conclusions of others that their role, while not unimportant, is much less significant than the informal links. What Buchignani does not do is question the dominant methodological framework of such studies – structural-functionalism – and explore its limitations, and the alternative supplementary methodologies available.

One of the results of the lack of a methodological critical self-consciousness is the inattention to the built-in biases. These biases are reflected in the various correlates used as the norms to measure performance in the Indochinese communities under study.

For example, the Woon, Wong and Woo study of the Ethnic Vietnamese in Greater Victoria is a lament in the guise of a sociological study. The Indochinese are likened to loose sand – the title of the piece – separated and scattered when they left Vietnam and easily separated and scattered as a result of internal and external forces in Canada. The issue is not whether the Indochinese are "increasingly experiencing psychological, social and economic stresses" – a totally expected outcome after the initial survival period – but the degree of such stresses, the coping mechanisms in place and the degree and rate of comparative societal breakdown in relation to other social groups as well as in relation to the creative social dynamic of the group.

Thus, the authors predict that "the younger generation will be more and more Canadianized". Not surprising. They lament that the ethnic Vietnamese and Sino-Vietnamese "have not succeeded in maintaining a genuine community-wide association" which "might have resulted in a collective effort to improve their general economic condition and ensured the effective maintenance of culture and language to the next generation." But why would the Sino-Vietnamese not