Shortbook: Indo-Chinese Refugees in Japan

(Yukiko Abe, Center of Documentation of Refugees and Migrants Staff, July 25, 2010)

After the fall of Saigon in 1975, the Japanese government first only provided provisional assistance to refugees arrived in Japan from Vietnam and then encouraged them to go to a third-country such as U.S. or Canada for settlement. In 1978, Japan decided to give a maximum of these 500 Indo-Chinese refugees special permission to stay in Japan. However, because this small number was criticized by other countries in relation to Japan’s economic power at the time, so the government increased the quota (Yamagami 2007, 38-39). In 1989, A Comprehensive Plan Action (CPA) which encouraged Indo-Chinese refugee’s resettlement in new countries was adopted by 74 countries including Japan.

From 1978 to 2005, 11,334 Indo-Chinese refugees were admitted to stay in Japan (RHQ, 2006). Out of them, 3,536 were boat people who came to Japan by boat and 4,372 came to Japan from refugee camps in Asia (ibid). In the same period, 6,816 people who arrived in Japan as boat people departed for countries such as the U.S. and Canada (MOJ, 2005) to pursue a better life after a short stay in Japan.

The quasi government organization, the Refugee Assistance Headquarters (RHQ) provided language and culture courses as well as health and job consultation for Indo-Chinese refugees from 1982 to 2005. While taking four months of language training and two months of life orientation courses, refugees lived in public shelters and received subsidies for their living costs. In addition, civil organizations also partially supported the refugee settlement. However, soon after the courses, Indo-Chinese were expected to be “independent” even though many were not ready.

The UNHCR report on integration of Indo-Chinese refugees in Japan in 2009 found that: 1) poor Japanese language skill limits refugees’ capabilities to access domestic public services, to ask for better working conditions, and to look for other employment opportunities; 2) the involvement of local governments in resettling Indo-Chinese refugees was minimal and 3) some respondents cited discrimination that persists within Japanese society against refugees and other foreign nationals (Kawai et al., 2009).

Points of Interest:

1. Official information regarding refugee acceptance in Japan can be found at http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/refugee/japan.html
2. History of the RHQ which includes Indo-Chinese history in Japan can be found at: http://www.fweap.or.jp/history%20of%20RHQ.htm
3. The Study of Local Integration of Indochinese Refugees in Japan: Midterm Report on the Study(UNU Video Portal)(Japanese Only) can be found at: http://c3.unu.edu/unuvideo/index.cfm?fuseaction=event.home&EventID=204

Bibliography:


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1 Indo-Chinese refugees are not recognized as refugee in light of the Refugee Convention, they are authorized to settle in Japan as residences by the Japanese government. The Japanese government stopped accepting Indo-Chinese refugees in 2005 because the areas’ political tension became calmer. There is no official data about how many people out of this number still live in Japan now.

2 They are not included in the total Indo-Chinese number in Japan.