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VIETNAMESE COMMUNITIES IN AMERICA

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ABSTRACT

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The object of this undergraduate thesis are Vietnamese communities in America. This work is divided into five parts. The introduction deals with Vietnam, Vietnamese history and the reason why people fled their homeland. The second part explains the concept of assimilation, and addresses various types of benchmarks that the refugees had to overcome. The third chapter describes secondary parts of assimilation such as change of name or religion. The fourth chapter focuses on some chosen peculiarity of states with the biggest concentration of the Vietnamese immigrants, California and Texas. The last part of this bachelor thesis summarizes the acquired pieces of information, and highlights the mutual benefits obtained by the clash of two diverse cultures.

Keywords: America, Assimilation, Immigration, Refugees, Vietnam, Vietnamese communities, War

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INTRODUCTION

The Socialist Republic of Vietnam is a long “S” shaped country, with an area of approximately 330,000 square kilometres, bordered by China to the North, by Laos and Cambodia to the Northwest and Southwest respectively and to the east shore by the South China Sea. With the population of 94 million people Vietnam is the 14th most inhabited country in the world (“Countries in the world by population,” n.d.). Apart from possessing large areas of fertile soil on account of the Red River in the North and the Mekong in the South, it is also a land with long and rich past.

Vietnamese history is closely intertwined with Chinese as far back as hundreds years before Christ. The Chinese domination was fought for various periods of time; the rebellion of Trung sisters which broke in 1st century A.C. or of another female warrior Lady Triệu in 3rd century A.C. being unforgettable attempts to remove the Chinese emperors from the Vietnamese lands. Trung sisters along with Lady Trieu became the symbols of nationalism and independence. Since 16th century European missionaries had been spreading a new religion, Catholicism, which joined already existing Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism. During 19th century a new usurper arose – France. The present-day Vietnam was made of Tonkin, Annam and Cochin-China regions which were systematically seized by the French empire, and in 1887 with Cambodia and in 1893 with Laos these territories were established as the colonial French Indochina (Lawrence, 2008; Müllerová, 2004). The Nguyễn dynasty was still officially reigning until the World War II but had actually no power (Lawrence, 2008, p. 11-13). When France surrendered to Germany in 1940 it enabled Japan to occupy Vietnam; this event even more motivated nationalistic-oriented minds to fight for Vietnamese freedom from foreign government because they did not want to as Lawrence (2008) stated, “merely exchange one colonial

master for another” (p. 23). Hồ Chí Minh, who had been a long-time supporter of the Marx-Lenin ideology, Communism, established the Việt Minh forces, and after Japan capitulated in August 1945 Hồ Chí Minh declared the Democratic Republic of Vietnam on 2nd September 1945. According to Lawrence (2008), “he started by quoting the American Declaration of Independence” (p. 27) to express reliance on the United States and hope that the Americans would acknowledge the Vietnamese desire to be independent. Consequently, China and Britain were assigned to oversee the withdrawal of Japanese troops; China on the North entrusted the power back to the revolutionaries but Britain yielded the South to the French. After long negotiations nothing had come to an amicable settlement and this ultimately marked another continuation of Vietnamese-French conflict which lasted until 1954 (Müllerová, 2004).

The First Vietnam War (also called the Anti-French Resistance War or the First Indochina War) had the form of a guerrilla warfare; the Việt Minh forces had their bases in the mountains and were led by skilful Võ Nguyên Giáp. The desire to eliminate the French troops from homeland increased, but France did not want to lose the prosperous territory. Subsequently, France established the State of Vietnam with the former emperor Bảo Đại as its head. Furthermore, France sought help from other countries and gave the colonial war a new dimension. The fear of Chinese and Soviet Union’s growing influence on Vietnam embroiled the USA into the conflict. The definite defeat of the long lasting French colonizers came with the Battle of Điện Biên Phủ in 1954 (Bankston III, n.d.; Lawrence, 2008; Müllerová, 2004). As a result, the Geneva Conference was held and produced the Geneva Accords which separated Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam from each other. Moreover, Vietnam was to be divided temporarily by a demarcation line along the 17th parallel until unification elections could be held; these never came to a successful outcome. Simultaneously, a free movement of citizens was permitted for 300 days (“The

Conference,” n.d.), and a massive group of mostly Catholics and intelligence made the passage from the North in favour of the South for a fear of communist persecutions (Müllerová, 2004). This departure was called by the Americans as the Passage to Freedom (Lawrence, 2008, p. 57). According to Waite (2012), “Geneva has produce a nasty compromise, which divided a country and created almost a million refugees” (p. 2).

After the division of Vietnam the South was led by the government of the former minister Ngô Đình Diệm, a strong minded anti-Communist Catholic, who gained enough votes in a referendum to become the president of the newly declared Republic of Vietnam. The originally intended democratic state slowly turned into a corruptive and tyrannical country; a fact which prompted many protests against his regime. Additionally, the failure of reunification led to the creation of the National Liberation Front, better known as Viet Cong, and promptly to a conflict that escalated into the Second Vietnam War (also known as the Anti-U.S. War of National Salvation or the Second Indochina War) which lasted until the Fall of Saigon in 1975 (Bankston III, n.d.; Lawrence, 2008; Müllerová, 2004). The beginning of the war is quite hard to specify as the scholars cannot seem to agree on one year and therefore set various dates. Lawrence (2008) stated “the fighting that took place in Vietnam between 1961 and 1975 has many names” (p. 1). Müllerová (2004) suggested the American war began in 1963 (p. 104). According to Chan (2006), American troops were involved since 1965 (p. 44). Rumbaut (n.d.) went even further and simply presented the war period as one term - “the thirty-year Vietnam War (1945-1975)” (p. 2).

The United States had always supported the French - the reason for this backing was an increasing apprehension of the communist influence. The Americans feared the so called domino theory - that communism would spread from Vietnam to the neighbouring countries (“War dominated 30 years,” n.d.) and therefore took it upon themselves, as the self-proclaimed bearers of democratic principles, to guard and maintain borders of the

democratic state. Since 1961 American troops were repeatedly sent firstly by the 35th president J. F. Kennedy and then by his successor Lyndon B. Johnson to aid the southern government, but the conflict with the northern authority was still not nearing its end. Their effort was made complicated by the fact that the rural population leaned to the side of Viet Cong as a result of forced relocation to the strategic villages and by the Ho Chi Minh trail which was used for transportation of soldiers, supplies and weapons from the North to the South. Additionally, the self-immolation of a Buddhist monk, resulting from the oppression of Buddhist clergy by the Diem regime, added to the increasing disturbance. The situation quickly escalated after president Diệm was overthrown in a U.S.-supported coup and then killed on 1st November 1963. The argument for the official entrance into the Vietnamese civil war was the so called Gulf of Tonkin incident when a destroyer USS Maddox, an American naval warship, was allegedly attacked by the northern Vietnamese navy in 1964. The Second Vietnamese War was fought relentlessly with both traditional weaponry of the World War II but also with the new inventive weapons such as the controversial pesticide Agent Orange and napalm. Additionally, carpet bombings such as the Operation Rolling Thunder or Operation Flaming Dart were carried to disable the covering of the Ho Chi Minh trail and their tremendous destructive power can be still seen in the landscape up to this day (Bankston III, n.d.; Lawrence, 2008; Müllerová, 2004).

In spite of the initial enthusiasm and confidence of being the winning side the Americans were not able to defeat the determined northern Vietnamese and their allies in a quest of reuniting the state. The turning point came with the Tết offensive in 1968. Viet Cong attacked the capital of South, Saigon, and took control over it for few hours before the Southerners again regained their positions. Nevertheless, the American public's tolerance for the number of casualties reached its breaking point. Simultaneously, the news of various massacres of civilians, such as Mỹ Lai or Huế massacre, were brought to the

light. Massive protests were held to demand negotiations to end the war. But the dissatisfaction with the ongoing war was also on the North. Lawrence (2008) stated, “North Vietnamese draftees, like their American counterparts, increasingly sought medical deferment, and a few mutilated their own bodies to avoid service” (p. 133). Johnson’s successor Richard M. Nixon promised to withdraw the American soldiers and enforce the “Vietnamization”. That is, the Vietnamese should settle the conflict between themselves without further intervention from the U.S. (Chan, 2006, p.53). In 1973 Paris Peace Accords were signed which meant the definite departure of American troops. The southern government without aid of its ally succumbed to the pressure from the North, and in April 1975 Saigon was seized and renamed to Ho Chi Minh in honour of the man who fought for the independence of the nation. On 2nd July 1976 Vietnam was finally reunited and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam was established (Lawrence 2008).

Shortly before the fall of Saigon Nixon’s successor Gerald R. Ford Jr. ordered an evacuation which consisted of a very diverse group of people. There were U.S. military personnel, South Vietnamese officials and Vietnamese elite who feared the upcoming rule of communist leaders. These at-risk Vietnamese people are recognized as the first wave of refugees who arrived in the U.S. (Bankston III, n.d.; Chan, 2006). D. H. Do (2011) asserted that “Vietnamese emigration is generally divided into two periods, each with several waves” (p. 2234).

At first, the exact number of evacuees intended to be moved away was not precisely given due to the fact that the U.S. government did not want to quicken the fall of Nguyễn Văn Thiệu’s government. President Ford anticipated approximately 130,000 refugees, from which about 125,000 should be Vietnamese. The first wave began on 1st April when people were slowly transferred via aircrafts. The evacuation sped up on 22nd April and culminated with the second wave on 29th and 30th April with the Operation

Frequent Wind (Chan, 2006; Do, 2011). This operation was quite peculiar because the helicopters that were carrying the evacuees dropped off their passengers on the U.S. decks and were then pushed over the ships to make room for other incoming aircrafts (Chan, 2006). Chan (2006) reported that during the last two days “the helicopters managed to lift out 7,014 people before Saigon fell on the morning of April 30” (p. 63). The final, third wave, lasted for the first two weeks of May 1975 and consisted of people leaving in small boats and ships which were then taken up on by the U.S. naval ships and cargo ships (D. H. Do, 2011).

In 1978 a massive wave of new refugees emerged. This group consisted of ethnic minorities, mainly Chinese (also called Sino-Chinese, Chinese Vietnamese or Ethnic Chinese) who fled Vietnam when China became involved in the war between Vietnam and Cambodia. Apart from these, another people formed this wave. The newly formed government began its quest of various political, social and economic reformations, and many people were sent to re-education camps. These re-eds were later admitted to the U.S under the Released Re-education Detainees Program (also known as Humanitarian Operation). In addition, the large and small business were seized by the state and the owners were sent to remote regions to rebuild their livelihood. As abandoning of such fixed placement would be illegal and situation became unbearable many decided to flee to the sea. As they used small wooden boats meant only for river travel, these individuals became to be known as the Boat People. Many of them drowned either as a result of the poor construction of boats or died during the assaults from Thai pirates that awaited them in the Gulf of Thailand (Chan, 2006; D. H. Do, 2011; Rumbaut, n.d.).

In 1982 Amerasian Immigration Act was passed. It allowed the children of Vietnamese mothers and American fathers to emigrate from Vietnam into the United States. These children were called *bụi đời* (the dust of life) and often abandoned and

discriminated as they were the children of the enemy. Merely 4,500 children immigrated as they could not be accompanied by any family members. In 1987 Amerasian Homecoming Act was issued which abolished the restriction applied on the family members. Thus many resettlement seeking Vietnamese, who were not entitled to immigration, “adopted or bought” these Amerasian children to gain access to the U.S. Approximately 90,000 new refugees entered the American lands (Chan, 2006).

Unlike the other national minorities that came into the United States, Vietnamese could not integrate into already existing communities, as there were essentially not any established prior to their arrival. Therefore, my aim is to observe to which extent the Vietnamese immigrants and their children have assimilated into the American culture without help of an experienced guidance, to which degree has the Vietnamese culture influenced the American society, and how the Vietnamese communities are incorporated into the American cities.

1 CONCEPT OF ASSIMILATION

To truly understand the process which the Vietnamese immigrants have undergone the term assimilation must be explained. It can be described in many ways. For example, Oxford reference (n.d.) states that cultural assimilation is “the incorporation of a culture into the general host society. The acceptance of the host culture may result in the loss of cultural identity of an ethnic group. In reality, cultural assimilation can range ...”. The most important part of this statement is that it may vary. Assimilation is a gradual process and as a result the incoming foreign society may be found in different stages of development. Brown & Bean (2006) suggested that one of the reasons for the various phases may be racial discrimination. Gordon (1964) used an example of the fictional originals Sylvanians and the other society called Mundovians to illustrate a full complete assimilation. He stated that it occurs when Mundovians have:

- 1) changed their cultural patterns (including religious belief and observance) to those of the Sylvanians;
- 2) taken on large-scale primary group with the Sylvanians, i.e., have entered fully into the societal network of groups and institutions, or societal structure, of the Sylvanians;
- 3) have intermarried and interbred fully with the Sylvanians;
- 4) have developed a Sylvanian, in place of a Mundovian, sense of peoplehood, or ethnicity;
- 5) have reached a point where they encounter no discriminatory behavior;
- 6) have reached a point where they encounter no prejudiced attitudes;

- 7) do not raise by their demands concerning the nature of Sylvania public or civic life any issues involving value and power conflict with the original Sylvania (for example, the issue of birth control). (p.70)

All these points lead to one of Gordon's (1964) assimilation model – a model of Anglo-Conformity. In this particular model, the minorities are instructed to abandon their own culture in favour of the values of the majority. The ethnic minority group becomes the majority. The second model speaks about the term Melting Pot which is commonly used when people are being taught about the American society. In this case, the various minorities blend together to create a completely new culture. And the last model presents the idea of Cultural Pluralism which would be the best outcome of assimilation. As the core of this theory is, contrarily to the first two, that the customs of every minority group would be preserved and would contemporaneously exist to form one society together. Gordon stated that, "It is possible for separate subsocieties to continue their existence even while the cultural differences between them become progressively reduced and even in greater part eliminated" (p. 158). The explanation for this statement is that he acknowledged two types of assimilation - cultural (behavioural) assimilation and structural assimilation. During the cultural assimilation the subsocieties learn about the culture of the dominant group, but simultaneously they can still maintain their own culture such as customs, language and food. But also at the same time while sustaining their own culture, they cannot violate the structure of fixed American conventions – the subsocieties have to integrate into the social structure (Gordon, 1964).

According to Myers and Pitkin (2010), the "assimilation benchmarks are ... citizenship, homeownership, English language proficiency, job status, earning a better income" (p. 4-5). All these benchmarks are correlated. To be able to speak English usually means to have a job. To have a job may lead to earning more money than in the original

nation. To be at a better financial position heads to the obtaining of a house. To own a house in a different country than in the original homeland shows certain reconciliation with the situation of living abroad. The awareness of such fact encourages the acceptance of values of the different nation and in the course of time to become a part of community and to evolve into a full-fledged citizen of the given land. To be a citizen of a particular country can be achieved in three ways – to be born in the country, through marriage and by naturalization.

By the observation of these authors it can be presumed that assimilation is a very intricate complexity, and it consists of various fields that can be studied. It can also be influenced by many factors – either positively or negatively. Positive impact on the process of acculturation, especially of immigrants, is if the host country is in a peaceful, prosperous and economically stable state. Negatively affecting can be a financially volatile, racist, diversity-intolerant society (Shah, n.d.; Brown & Bean, 2006). America was drained both mentally and physically after the Vietnamese war, and she furthermore struggled with the arising issue of the African Americans. Also factors such as emotional turmoil of leaving homeland should be taken into consideration, as the departure was often abrupt and troublesome. Finally, when all these facts are taken into account, it can let to the conclusion that the Americans did not welcome the Vietnamese refugees with open arms, and that the Vietnamese assimilation was slow and faced many obstacles. What I would like to do is focus on few chosen parts of the process of incorporation into the American culture as I understand that these fields have many different roles – some of them are very important, primary such as language, others have secondary roles, for example name change.

1.1 Language

Language is one of the aspects that is linked to the national culture of a sovereign country. English as a second language (n.d) reminded the opinion of President Theodore Roosevelt that, “We should provide for every immigrant . . . the chance to learn English; and if after say five years he has not learned English, he should be sent back to the land from whence he came”. Reyhner (2006) observed and presented one point how language can be viewed:

People supporting making English the official language see its dominance threatened by immigrants and consider it the “glue” that holds our country together and a cure-all to the problems of poverty faced by many ethnic minorities in the United States . . . Others maintain that the “glue” holding this country together is not the English language but rather the ideas embodied in the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution, and other key documents of the democratic experience. (p. 84-85)

The importance of knowing English cannot be overshadowed, and not learning it cannot be avoided because to fully participate in a society a person must know how to effectively convey his/her thoughts, and the easiest way is to express them through words – through words that are understandable and comprehensible to the receiver/listener/reader, that is, the American people. But the problem connected to the acceptance of the English language that have arisen in the course of few years is the fact that English is slowly and gradually replacing Vietnamese as the mother tongue, and many Vietnamese are losing one part of their heritage. But language alone does not make a whole particular country with its peculiarities. It is also both observed and predicted that the original immigrant groups speak mainly Vietnamese as their native tongue with some English; the second generation, their children, is bilingual – both Vietnamese and English have equal positions

in the generation's language proficiency; and lastly the third generation is expected to speak English only (Waters & Jimenez, 2005, p. 7). And being bilingual is actually an advantage as researchers have found that people who speak two languages are more intelligent and more perceptive.

Bankston III (n.d.) reported:

By 1990 almost three-fourths of Vietnamese in the United States could speak English well or very well. Only 20.5 percent did not speak English well, and only 4.7 percent could not speak English at all. There were differences between those who arrived before 1980 and those who arrived after 1980, but both groups showed high levels of English-language ability. Among the pre-1980 immigrants, 86.9 percent reported that they could speak English well or very well and only 2.0 percent reported that they could not speak English at all. Among the post-1980 immigrants, 62.8 percent said that they could speak English well or very well, and 7.3 percent said that they could not speak English at all. (para. Acculturation and Assimilation)

The reason why the pre-1980 Vietnamese were more eloquent may be connected to the fact that the first wave of immigrants consisted of mostly highly educated people or people that could afford to have studied abroad for some period of time. As the subsequent waves of immigrants were essentially comprised of people oriented on agriculture it could not be expected of them to know any English.

The United States Census Bureau conducts every few years a research about English proficiency – the ability to speak English and at which level the speakers are. The participants are aged 5 years and over. The census distinguishes four levels of English

proficiency – language spoken very well, well, not well and spoken not at all. The phrase “Limited English proficiency” is such a case when the Vietnamese speak English at lower level than “very well”. Shin and Bruno (2003) observed in the Census 2000 that 33.9 percent of Vietnamese spoke English very well and 33.7 percent spoke English well. Shin and Kominski (2010) detected in the following research Census 2007 that 39.3 percent of Vietnamese communicated very well and 29 percent communicated well. Ryan (2013) examined in Census 2011 that 39.8 percent expressed themselves very well and 27.1 percent expressed themselves well.

According to these three researches it can be asserted that the number of very well English speaking Vietnamese is slowly but steadily increasing and can be expected to still do so in the near future. It may be on the account that in modern era it is easier to gain access to various teaching techniques providing simple, effective and most importantly variety of methods that would comply with every individuals need. In overall, proficiency in English has been approved but Vietnamese also expressed their desire to maintain their native language due to intention and aspiration to be able to communicate with family members in Vietnam, or due to the fact that they want to hold onto the heritage and further teach their future children their cultural background. There are even language classes where people are given “a chance to reconnect with their roots” (Ebru TV, 2010). To conclude, it has been agreed on that to properly participate in the American society one has to be able to communicate in the national language, but also revitalization and re-learning of the Vietnamese language is crucial for the preservation of the Vietnamese culture.

1.2 Education and Employment status

The ability to understand the language of the host country, in this case English, is also linked to another factor that could help the immigrants with their social position – education. Education is valued very highly in the Vietnamese culture, and this stance

towards the importance of schooling has been also carried abroad into the United States. Success in school may continue, and usually does lead, to successfully ensuring a good employment and therefore becoming a respected participant of a society. It may also go beyond individuals and these outstanding persons can change the view how others perceive the immigrants and bring some recognition and acknowledgement to both Vietnamese society and family.

It has been noted that the Vietnamese refugees from the first wave were more educated than the refugees from the second wave, and that their social status was on a higher level compared to them. According to Jiobu (1988), “Twenty percent of those 18 years or older have had some college education” (p. 54). However, with the arrival to the United States the occupation positions of first wave refugees significantly declined as many jobs required English attainment. Many Vietnamese had to accept lower positions in employment meaning also lower income, and many Vietnamese had to restart their education (Do, 2011; Ebru TV, 2010; Jiobu, 1988). This fact is further confirmed by Jiobu (1988) who asserted that, “According to government estimates, 68% of the heads of households had white-collar jobs in Vietnam but in the United States, only 39% of these people have the same level of job” (p. 55). White-collar workers are those who are in managements, business and administrative, and have a stable position and relatively well paid. Another group are Blue-collar workers are those who engage in manual work. This particular group has two sides to it. The disadvantage of being a blue-collar means that one gets his hands dirty, on the other hand, these people are associated with the excellent blue-collar work ethic. And finally, the Pink-collar workers are associated with women jobs such as nurses, teachers etc. It is pointed out that because of this correlation these jobs are not viewed as highly and are underappreciated (M. Kohout, personal communication, June 14, 2016). A freshman of the Yale University Quynh Do supported Jiobu’s claim by

recalling a true story of her father's struggle as he was, "a dentist in Vietnam, he did not know English and so he could not get an American dental degree. So he had to go to work at a tool factory" (Ebru TV, 2010). To sum up, Vietnamese immigrants were generally forced to accept a low paid job and had to frequently rebuild their lives from scratch.

The Vietnamese, more specifically the Vietnamese Americans, achieve a higher level of education than their parents did before them. In the research of 1990 it has been observed that approximately half of the Vietnamese Americans ranging from aged 18 to 24 attended a university. The percentage is higher than of the American students as the figure of their attendance was about 39.5 percent. The amount of Vietnamese American students who left high school has also been lower than of other American citizen (Bankston III, n.d.). Nevertheless, the research conducted in between 2006 and 2010 showed that 26.3 percent of the examined people who identified themselves as only Vietnamese, aged 25 and over, possessed a bachelor's degree or even a degree of higher level. But in comparison to the Asian standard of estimate 50.2 percent, for example Chinese percentage is 51.8 or percentage of Indian is 70.7, the Vietnamese are falling behind (Ogunwole, Drewery & Rios-Vargas, 2012).

When it is to be spoken about employment, it is necessary to clarify the concept of "labor force". Labor force is a term used for people who are already working or searching for a job. It is made of two components – employed and unemployed people ("Defining the Labor Force, n.d.). Another term which should be explained is the "civilian labor force". The civilian labor force consist of people, "who have jobs or are seeking a job, are at least 16 years old, are not serving in the military and are not institutionalized ("Civilian Labor Force", n.d.). The report from Zong and Batalova (2016) noted that in 2014 the percentage of Vietnamese immigrants working in the civilian labor force was higher compared to the American native-born, 67 percent for Vietnamese and 62 percent for natives. From the

table Zong and Batalova conducted (2016) it can be observed that equally 31 percent of Vietnamese immigrants held a position in a) management, business, science and arts and b) service occupations.

1.3 Culture and Cultural clashes

The United States have been since their establishment a multicultural society. That is, various groups of different backgrounds and customs coexist side by side. But it seems that in the quest of reaching the “American Dream” some Vietnamese have partially forsaken their cultural background (Bankston III, n.d.).

One of the clashes that may occur is between generations. One of the stepping stones that make up the Vietnamese culture is based on showing respect towards elders. The American culture promotes equality amongst everyone. Logistically, parents may be dismayed if their children would lack humility in their manners towards them, as they themselves were raised in a very strict parent-authority upbringing. Or the elderly Vietnamese citizens may be appalled by a behaviour expressing an absence of a certain amount of humbleness.

Another clash may appear as two of the promoted American values are independence and individuality. It is common in America to marry and then leave the parents household to establish his/her own home. The same applies to the college students when they go away to study and hardly return to their parent’s home. But the Vietnamese value family very highly. A family is not viewed as a group consisting only of parents and their children (a nuclear family), they consider a family as a whole company composing of parents, children, grandparents, aunts, uncles etc. So it is common that the Vietnamese family, even after marriage, usually remains together and share one house. Of course, if the housing does not enable such number of people inhabiting one place, they are forced to find

another home to occupy but if it is possible, they find a new home not far away from the parent's household (Ebru TV, 2010; Ch. D. Le., personal communication, June 6, 2016).

The last one of the cultural clashes that will be mentioned here is the struggle of Vietnamese men and women with their new social positions. The Vietnamese culture is quite a patriarchal one. Men were the providers of income and women took care of the households, looked after the children and overall were the maintainers of traditions. With the different society they found themselves in came the struggle of finding the balance, as the position of men lowered and consequently gave a passage for equality amongst the genders. Nevertheless, according to Kibria (1993), the women had problem with coping with their unfamiliar status they attained and often rejected it as they valued the traditional family system and its selflessness and cooperation traits. Understandably, it is different with the younger generation as they are encouraged to study but at the end they are still expected to be wives and mothers foremost (Bankston III., n.d.). Altogether, this newfound freedom and independence can cause some friction with the older generation as they may condemn the behaviour improper and diverting from the original customs.

Ultimately, the one feature that both Americans and Vietnamese share is being hard-working. The belief that hard work will secure a good prosperous position is common for both parties, therefore both Americans and Vietnamese work tirelessly to gain such position. As Yale professor Quang Phu Van observe, the issue that the second generation encounter is the generational gap with their parents, the first generation. He clarifies that, "The second generation grew up here [in America] and they adapt to the American value system, and at the same time they have to learn about the traditions and the culture of their parents" (Ebru TV, 2010).

2 SECONDARY ASSIMILATION

This section will discuss the secondary features of assimilation. As mentioned above, the secondary parts of acculturation are easier to overcome than a language barrier, for example.

2.1 Change of name

Vietnamese alphabet is made of Latin writing system which should be in comparison to Chinese easier to pronounce, read and write. A typical Vietnamese name consist of three parts – a family name, a middle name and a given name. For example, in the name *Lê Thu Hà*, *Lê* is a family name from father's side, *Thu* is a middle name (in this case mother's middle name) and *Hà*, a first name. Nevertheless, some Vietnamese have chosen to even change their name. This fashion may be explained as a desire to be further engaged into the American culture and to increase a chance of employment, or to simplify the name for better pronunciation as some may find difficulty in it due to Vietnamese being a tonal language.

There are three possibilities of modification. As seen above, the family name comes first in a traditional Vietnamese name, thus the first change may occur by switching the last name to the post position. The form would be *Thu Ha Le*. The second variant is to combine a typical Vietnamese surname and an American first name together, for example author Andrew Lam or actor Dustin Nguyen. Finally, the last case occurs with an alteration of the family name. That is, for example the abundant surname *Nguyễn* changed into Newman or Winn (Bankston III., n.d.). Additionally, Vietnamese women retain their maiden name after marriage in contrast to America when it is common to accept a husband's family name.

2.2 Religious and Political beliefs

The religion practised most by the Vietnamese is and was Buddhism. Buddhism promotes harmony with both Nature and people. The main Four Truths of Buddhism which are the path that should lead to the Enlightenment are:

- a) life is suffering – life is filled with physical pain and mental loneliness
- b) suffering is caused by cravings and desire – chasing after them is the source of suffering
- c) suffering can be defeated by eliminating desire – free oneself by refusing temptations of the world
- d) follow the Eightfold Path – lead a moral virtuous life (live harmoniously, behave righteously, think purely, meditate, ...)

The other religion that is believed in is Catholicism. According to Bankston III (n.d.), “The rituals and practises of the Vietnamese Catholics are the same as those of Catholics everywhere, but ... the Vietnamese outlook is heavily influenced by Confucianism” (para. Religion). This fact should not cause any friction as the essential point of Confucianism is not contradictory to the teaching of Bible as the Confucianism promotes hierarchy, duty and ancestors worshiping.

Jibou (1988) stated that, “Unlike the Vietnamese population of prewar Vietnam, where 10% were Catholic, 40% of the refugees are Catholic” (p. 55). This means that initially the Vietnamese refugees did not have to change their religion in order to fit in, as the majority of religious Americans was also Catholic. This offered some benefits to the arriving immigrants as they were receiving support from the government and also from the catholic charities (D. H. Do, 2011). Furthermore, Do’s study found the following:

Vietnamese Americans have built Catholic churches in many of the communities where they reside. In fact, on Sundays when Catholic masses are held, most

churches are completely full. Vietnamese Americans are also active in many church-related activities, as well as in the larger Catholic Church itself. (p. 2248).

Having said that, with the later waves of immigration the situation changed. The incoming refugees were mostly Buddhists, therefore they have joined the already existing Chinese Buddhist community. The need for establishing Buddhist temples arose and the wish to build shrines was eventually granted.

Politics and political affiliation represent another set of beliefs. As the refugees fled because of a communist regime, the initial wave of immigrants was deeply anti-communist and created a huge community of traditional and conservative Vietnamese population. Apart from conservativeness and traditionalism, promoting business and wealth correlates with the Republican Party. Nevertheless, the younger generation differs from the older one. They lean more to the democratic and liberal spectrum as they, as professor Kohout comments, "don't have the same kind of black and white, monochrome view of Vietnam and their past". This is further supported by numbers when in the period of three years (2001 – 2003) 24 years old people were asked about their political preferences. The Democrats exceeded the Republicans with 25.0 percent Vietnamese and 29.8 percent Chinese Vietnamese endorsing the Democrats to the opposite of 18.2 percent Vietnamese and 11.3 percent who supported the Republicans (D. H. Do, 2011; M. Kohout, personal communication, June 14, 2016; Rumbaut, n.d.).

The deep-rooted opposition, hatred even, towards communism and all things connected to it causes problem until today. Professor Kohout recalled an incident when somebody wanted to display the official Vietnamese flag (red background and gold star in the middle) during some cultural celebration, and it caused a huge hysteria as the flag is viewed as a symbol of the communist dictatorship. The Vietnamese immigrants prefer the Southern flag which is gold with three red stripes. He compared this episode to his

encounters in Pilsen while entering various small shops and noticed that the owners display the official Vietnamese flag. He said, “If they did that in Orange County, people would like throw grenades through their windows” (M. Kohout, personal communication, June 14, 2016). Bankston III (n.d.) presented another situation when owner of a small electronics shop Truong Van Tran hang up a picture of Ho Chi Minh on a wall in his shop. There were some complaints and finally, the owner of the mall brought it to the court. The judge acknowledged Mr. Tran’s right of freedom due to the First Amendment. Nevertheless, upon arriving back to his store Mr. Tran was assaulted by his fellow Vietnamese immigrants.

2.3 Food

Generally, Vietnamese cuisine is very fresh and it is customary to go every morning to the food market to buy new ingredients. This habit is supported by the fact that until recent years, many Vietnamese did not own a refrigerator (Ebru TV, 2010). The cuisine is further based mostly on vegetables, herbs and seafood. There are many reason for this - due to the geographical location being a seaside state, due to the fact that Vietnam was mostly agricultural land and lastly due to the fact that meat was expensive and therefore not accessible for many people. The Vietnamese cuisine has been influenced mainly by Chinese and Thai cuisine but because Vietnam was for some period of time a French colony there are also some altered versions of baguettes and coffee for example. Earlier and also now the only time when the family is gathered together is during dinner. So that is the reason why dinner are very important to Vietnamese people.

Phở is a national Vietnamese dish recognized worldwide. This soup can be eaten at any part of day or night - consumed as a breakfast, a lunch and a dinner. It is made of rice noodles, rich broth (usually beef or chicken seasoned with roasted onion, ginger, cinnamon and star anise), herbs and vegetables (such as cilantro and scallions). It can be additionally served with *Quẩy* (fried pastry), lime and chilli.

Beside language, set of values and customs, food is one of the ties that link Vietnamese to their culture even if they are not in the homeland. Food is a sacred thing in which homesick person can find solace. But food is also one of the parts of assimilation that might have changed due to different culture. The immigrants might have encountered problems with acquiring of some ingredients. The ingredients might have not grown in the United States and their import would be too expensive. For this reason, some traditional Vietnamese food might have gone through some alternation (Vu Voeks 2012). Vu and Voeks (2012) conducted a research which was concerned with the change of flavours and tastes among the Vietnamese dishes in Orange County, California. They made a distinction between 3 generations. The first generation being adult Vietnamese immigrants, the 1.5 generation being small children and adolescence Vietnamese immigrants and the second generation being Vietnamese children born in America. An example where such distinction plays a crucial role is given during one particular Thanksgiving when all these three generations prepared a family feast. The hostess mother who is a first generation immigrant prepared a traditional Vietnamese rice dish *xôi gấc*. The hostess and her younger sister who belong into the 1.5 generation made dishes which at the first sight looked like the classical American turkey, vegetables etc. Nevertheless, the turkey was soaked in *Nước mắm* (fish sauce) and the vegetables were mixed with *xì dầu* (soy sauce). The hostess sisters where born in the U.S. and therefore are a second generation did not have any Vietnamese influence in their dishes (Vu & Voeks, 2012).

However, there is no fear of a possibility losing the traditional Vietnamese cuisine as in recent years the Americans have become bolder and have finally distinguished Vietnamese and Chinese dishes apart. The Vietnamese cuisine gained recognition on its own which further encourages the Vietnamese to establish restaurants with Vietnamese food (Ebru TV, 2010).

Pham (2015) who has lived in the two of the biggest Vietnamese populated places, as she resided in Orange County for a decade and later on moved to Huston after her marriage, had the unique opportunity to compare the authenticity of the served dishes in both Southern California and Huston. The first thing she mentioned is that in California the restaurants were foremost intended for the Vietnamese diners, and it can be argued that therefore no alternations to please the American taste occurred. Additionally, she highlighted that all three regions with their own distinguishable dishes can be found in the menus. Moreover, she pinpoints that in Houston it can be recognized that the dishes were primarily influenced by the Chinese and therefore a fusion of Vietnamese and Chinese cuisine occurred.

3 GENERAL OVERVIEW OF COMMUNITIES

With the arrival of so many people also came the issue with their housing. Therefore, four reception centres were opened to receive these refugees. Prior to their division into these centres, the refugees were systematically interviewed and examined for the following six months after they landed on the U.S. soil. Camp Pendleton in California opened as the first reception centre on 29th April, Fort Chaffee in Arkansas on 2nd May and Eglin Air Base in Florida on 4th May. Additionally, to ease the pressure of the other three overcrowded centres, a fourth military base Fort Indiantown Gap in Pennsylvania was opened on 28th May (Chan, 2006, p. 64). The refugees were also faced with distaste and hostility aimed at them. The American society expressed “a fear of having jobs taken away, as well as having too much public assistance and welfare given to the refugees” (D. H. Do, 2011, p. 2238). Consequently, nine voluntary agencies, VOLAGs, were established to help the refugees resettle, and find sponsors which would help the refugees to enter into the American society. Moreover, the Refugee Dispersion Policy was employed. As D. H. Do (2011) described:

This policy served four purposes: (1) to relocate the Vietnamese refugees as quickly as possible so that they could achieve financial independence; (2) to ease the impact of a large group of refugees on a given community, which might otherwise increase the competition for jobs, social services, and housing; (3) to make it logistically easier to find the largest pool of sponsors possible; and (4) to prevent the development of an ethnic ghetto. (p. 2239)

Although the government attempted to disperse the immigrants proportionately most Vietnamese slowly relocated to the coast. Rumbaut (n.d.) stated:

By 1980, 45 percent of the 1975 arrivals lived in a state other than the one where they had been originally sent; and the refugee population living in California had doubled from about 20 percent to 40 percent, where they were concentrated in contiguous Southern California metropolitan areas and, to the north, in the "Silicon Valley" city of San Jose. (p. 6)

D. H. Do (2011) suggested that the reason for such movement may be due to the warmer weather. This assumption is proven to be right by one of Chan's student¹ (2006) as she explained that her family moved from Oregon at they "were attracted by California's warm climate" (p. 125). Additionally, D. H. Do (2011) stated "43 percent of Vietnamese who had migrated to Orange County gave "climate" as their primary reason ... 22 percent gave "job/finances/education ... followed by "family nearby" with 13percent" (p. 2243). In addition, Professor Kohout suggested that the reason for such big communities along the coast and sea was rather the agricultural background of Vietnamese – they being originally fishermen (personal communication, June 14, 2016).

The United States are the most desirable country for the Vietnamese immigrants and two states that are nowadays most inhabited by Vietnamese are California and Texas (Zong & Batalova, 2016). Prior to December 1975 the number of Vietnamese residing in California was small, 20.1 percent (27,199), and in Texas it was even less, 7.03 percent (9, 130). According to Von der Mehden (2010), "few Vietnamese living in Texas were primarily military personnel sent for training, students, and "war brides". Understandably, the number grew after the influx of refugees making it 34.78 percent (85, 238) in California and 11.34 percent (27,791) by the end of 1980. With another ten years the figure increased to 45.36 percent (280,223) on the West and 11.27 percent (69,634) on the South (D. H. Do, 2011). Interestingly, the resident population of California was 29,760,021 (US

¹ Chan collected various essays of her students and presented each of them without the author's name to retain anonymity

population, n.d.) and nevertheless, in the areas of Santa Ana and Westminster the name Nguyen outnumbered the name Smith by ratio 2:1; and in San Jose the Nguyens exceeded the Joneses “in the phone book 14 columns to 8” (Rumbaut, n.d. p. 6).

The newest Census 2010 offered a total of 37.3 percent Vietnamese living in California, and 13 percent Vietnamese settling in Texas. The most inhabited counties where the Vietnamese immigrants are located were Orange County, Santa Clara County, and Los Angeles County in California; and Harris County (Houston) in Texas (Hoeffel, Rastogi, Kim, & Shadid, 2012; Zong & Batalova, 2016). These various researches made in some intervals furthermore proved that the states where the Vietnamese secondary migrated are still the primary areas where they reside.

3.1 Little Saigon in California

The name Little Saigon bears a significant notion in itself as Saigon was the former name of the capital of the Southern Vietnam; nowadays this city is called Ho Chi Minh City. Actually, there are many areas through the United State that are called Little Saigon, but the enclave Little Saigon in Orange County is arguably one of the most recognizable area inhabited by a large population of Vietnamese. It spreads mostly over Westminster, Garden Grove, Santa Anna and Fountain Valley (Nguyen, 2015). To understand the surroundings of Little Saigon one has to know what “enclave” means. The definition offered by Healey and O’Brian (2009) presented the concept:

An enclave minority group establishes its own neighbourhood and relies on a set of interconnected businesses, each of which is usually small in scope, for its economic survival. Some of these businesses serve the group, whereas others serve the larger society... The economic success of enclave ... is partly due to the strong ties of cooperation and mutual aid within their groups. (p. 52)

This definition can be commented on by a suggestion that the establishment of Little Saigon was meant for a recreation of homeland where participants of such group would offer each other a guiding and a helping hand. Once again as it was stated prior – the Vietnamese refugees were not welcomed by any already existing community, therefore they may have felt abandoned and depressed. Additionally, it may be claimed that the establishment of such society which would consists of people with the same faith would probably be a very welcoming conception.

Professor Kohout explained that the Orange County was originally settled by white Midwesterners who took possession of large pieces of land and sold it further to gain wealth. Nowadays, the Orange County is essentially divided into two parts. The first part is represented by the old system of rich conservatives. The second area it the poor part of Orange County. What is quite curious is that instead of fighting to create their own place they go into defensive. Professor Kohout used a very imaginative comparison to a turtle. He said “They stay in their place and turtle down” (M. Kohout, personal communication, June 14, 2016). Nevertheless, there are some exceptions and those people want to participate in making decisions as D. H. Do (2011) presented a further proof of the fact that a successful acculturation and incorporation is ongoing as “In large cities ... it is not uncommon to find Vietnamese Americans running for elections on the local school board, city council, county supervisor, and state legislature. Tony Lam was the first Vietnamese American to be elected as a member of the Westminster City Council in California in 1992” (p. 2253). In 2014 there were two newly elected Vietnamese Americans mayors. An in-Thailand-camp-born refugee Bao Nguyen became a mayor of Garden Grove, and Tri Ta was re-elected as a Westminster mayor (A. Do, 2014).

3.2 Shrimp business in Texas

As the Dispersion Act was actually in an act, many refugees found themselves also in Texas. And as language was once again to be proven a barrier, the refugees, even those who were white-collars, had to take a job wherever it was available, in this case in fishing and shrimping. This were the first wave immigrants who were forced to live in Texas. The second group immigrated to Texas willingly. Those were the refugees that already had an agricultural past and wanted to reside by the coast of Gulf of Mexico which was famous for its shrimps (Rumbaut, n.d., Taylor 1984). Naturally, some problems arose as the “small Vietnamese shops raised competition in retail business, and cultural differences at work sometimes caused conflict” (von der Mehden, 2010). Vietnamese shrimpers gradually outnumbered the American shrimpers, and became owner of the most shrimp houses – from the total eleven, eight belonged to Vietnamese. The situation escalated at the turn of 1980 with an accidental gunning of one Texan fisherman by two Vietnamese in Seabrook village, and when the infamous Ku Klux Klan also became involved as they burned few of the Vietnamese boats and even hung an effigy of a Vietnamese fisherman (Sweets, 2010; “The Asian American Experience,” n.d.; Taylor, 1984;).

The Americans recognized the hard working quality the Vietnamese immigrants possessed, but on the other hand, they saw them as “rotten competitors” (Taylor, 1984), as they were all inconsiderate when the fishing and the shrimping were involved. The Americans additionally expressed distaste due to the ignorance of Vietnamese who were straining the bay to much as the “catches have been down by 50 percent or more in the past several years” (Taylor, 1984).

CONCLUSION

If everything above is to be taken into consideration, it can be asserted that the Vietnamese immigrants successfully assimilated in their own way into the American society. They are slowly deviating from their original Vietnamese mentality, and the younger Vietnamese are leaning towards and acquiring the American values. Some may find the acculturation as a disadvantage as Kibria's Binh² (1993) expressed his sentiment, "The best thing about life in America is that we're free to do what we want, but the worst thing is that the culture and customs make people rotten" (p. 4). He might have referred to the problem of not showing respect to the elderly properly or to the problem of becoming to self-centred and absorbed in the quest to gaining wealth. On the other hand, in the recent years many young Vietnamese Americans are rediscovering their heritage, and they indicated that they want to embrace the Vietnamese legacy (Ebru TV, 2010; Vu & Voeks, 2012).

It has also been observed that the encounter of two different cultures enabled a mutual exchange, as also the American society was furthermore enriched by various cultural events (annual Lunar New Year celebration festival in Garden Grove), food (apart from *Phở* also by arguably the most famous chilli sauce Sriracha that was invented by immigrant David Tran), and maybe even a new perspective. Not to mention that the relationship between America and Vietnam improved globally and became normalized as the recent visit of president Obama may be any clue.

Ultimately, the last thought I would like to convey is the fact that as I was assembling information about the Vietnamese immigrants, and as I read various interviews with the Vietnamese American children, adolescence and even grown adults I realized that

² It is not his real name as Kibria changed all names in his book in order to protect all participants

even though I live in a different country and I may be influenced by a different culture, I share some struggles with my Vietnamese American contemporaries. My parents may be born during the war but the post-war society did not alter the customs, moral notions and family values they were taught and therefore the upbringing I received from them. I hold both Vietnamese and Czech citizenship and I find myself torn between two cultures and do not necessarily feel I belong fully into either one.

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SUMMARY

Tématem této bakalářské práce jsou vietnamské komunity v Americe. Práce je rozdělena do pěti částí. V úvodu je popsán Vietnam, vietnamská historie a důvod, proč lidé uprchli ze své rodné země. V druhé části je vysvětlen koncept asimilace a je pojednáno o primárních milnících, které museli vietnamští uprchlíci překonat. Třetí kapitola popisuje sekundární složky asimilace jako je například změna jména či náboženství. Čtvrtá kapitola se zaměřuje na zajímavost ze států s největší koncentrací vietnamských imigrantů, a to Kalifornií a Texasem. Poslední část této bakalářské práce shrnuje získané poznatky a poukazuje na oboustranný prospěch získaný střetem dvou různorodých kultur.