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From Resettlement to Rights Protection: The Collective Actions of the Refugees from Vietnam in China since the Late 1970s

从安家到维权：二十世纪七十年代末以来在中国 的越南难民的集体行动

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Abstract

This article provides a general survey and some brief case studies of the collective actions of the refugees from Vietnam in China. The author argues that the collective actions of the refugees fall into two major categories — those aimed at reaching an ideal site of resettlement; and those caused by social and economic discontent. The article presents the collective actions of the refugees as a result of interactions between some peculiar features of the refugee community and the general conditions of China during the reform era, and an important aspect of the refugees' adaptation in China.

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Keywords

Refugee – adaptation – China – Vietnam – collective action

关键词

难民 – 适应 – 中国 – 越南 – 集体行动

Introduction

Nearly 300,000 refugees from Vietnam entered China in the late 1970s (Godley 1980; Chang 1982; Ramses 1991), and most of them were ethnic Chinese. Their exodus from Vietnam was both a cause and a consequence of the collapse of the Sino-Vietnamese alliance, and other causes of the hostility between China and Vietnam included Vietnam's abandonment of the policy of neutrality toward the Sino-Soviet conflict, Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia, territorial disputes between the two countries, and other factors. The resettlement of these refugees from Vietnam in state farms and other places in southern China resulted in the rise of small Vietnamese Chinese communities in various southern provinces. In recent years, these refugee communities in China have drawn much attention from Chinese scholars, officials, and reporters. Scholarly works have focused on the study of individual refugee communities, covering the settlement, remigration, adaptation, and identity of the refugees, and other issues (Chen 2007; Yao 2009; Chen Yiming, 2010; Kong 2010). Particularly active in conducting research on the refugee communities are the numerous graduate students from Jinan University, Sun Yat-sen University, Guangxi University for National Minorities, and Xiamen University, who have written M.A. theses and Ph.D. dissertations on state farms, returned Overseas Chinese, and the refugees from Vietnam. Most of these works combine both field investigation and archival research (Wu 2001; Chen 2007; Nagura 2007; Wang 2007; Kong 2008; Qu 2008; Tan 2008; Zhang 2008; Jiang 2009; Yao 2009; Chen Yunyun 2010). The officials who have written about the refugees understandably are more concerned with practical issues such as the economic reform and development of the Overseas Chinese state farms, the disputes over land rights of the refugee communities, and the incorporation of the Overseas Chinese state farms into local societies (Zeng, Chen and Zhang 1988; Jia 2004; Liang 2005; Liang 2006; Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the State Council 2006). Journalists have reported on both the achievements and problems of the refugee communities, paying special attention to the numerous incidents involving migrants from

Vietnam (Yan 1988; Wang 2003; Yu and Chen 2007; Wang and Yin 2009; Yin and Ning 2009; Li 2011; Xi and Lu 2011; Lu 2012).

Many of these works touches upon the issue of the collective actions of the refugees, though very few make it the central subject of study. In the past two summers, I visited numerous Overseas Chinese state farms in southern China to conduct oral interviews and field observations for a project about the adaptation of the refugees in China. During these visits I collected many oral accounts of the collective actions of the refugees as well as some appeals and supporting documents they created. These accounts, appeals and documents, as well as the three categories of publications mentioned above, provide the sources for this study, which concentrates on the various collective actions in which the refugees from Vietnam have been involved, including illegal migrations to other countries, unauthorized movements within China, and organized resistance against and collective appeals to local and higher authorities over various social and economic issues. In fact, the many collective actions organized by the refugees from Vietnam have given rise to the perception or misperception that the refugees from Vietnam are more likely to resist state authority than the returned Overseas Chinese from Indonesia and some other countries (Sun 2010: 212). Some refugees from Vietnam admit that they are indeed more united and defiant than the returned Overseas Chinese from other countries. Most of these collective actions were of small scale, and in general they were also peaceful, which distinguishes these actions from cases of collective violence that have drawn some informative studies (Tilly 2003; Barkan 2007; Short and Wolfgang 2009). Nevertheless, they deserve a careful examination since they form a very important aspect of the adaptation of the refugees in China.

The following sections will draw together observations from case studies of the collective actions of the refugees from Vietnam in China. This is not to prove that they are indeed more rebellious than other returned Overseas Chinese, but to show the causes and consequences of these collective actions, and their impact on the refugees capacity to adapt to life in China. I define collective action as any organized movement in defiance of the authorities. If we adopt Charles Tilly's definition of the three forms of collective actions, it would become clear that the refugees' movements are competitive, reactive but not proactive actions. Their actions were motivated not by a desire to acquire claims that had not previously been exercised, but by the perception that their interests had been threatened by neighboring groups, or that their legitimate rights had been violated by some power holders (Tilly 1978: 143-147). I argue that the collective actions of the refugees from Vietnam in China fall into two major categories — those aimed at reaching an ideal site of resettlement and those caused by social and economic discontent. Their collective

actions resulted from interactions between the special features of the refugee community and the conditions and changes of China during the reform era, and these features and conditions also explain why these movements tended to remain small scale and peaceful. The collective actions of the refugees, particularly those caused by social and economic discontent, are related to the mass protest movements that have emerged in China in recent years, and some of them form part of the *weiquan* (Rights Protection) movement that has involved people from many different parts of the country (Feng 2009: 150-158).

Collective Actions Aimed at Reaching an Ideal Site of Resettlement

The earliest collective resistance of the refugees took place immediately following their arrival in China and it was caused by their disappointment with their inability to travel to other countries and with China's policy of resettling most refugees on state farms in the countryside. Some refugees had taken China not as the destination of their journey but as a stepping stone to more advanced countries and regions (Han 2013A: 30). They were frustrated when they discovered that unlike Hong Kong and some Southeast Asian countries, China would resettle most of the refugees that had entered its borders within China rather than send them to other countries. The refugees were further angered when they learnt that they not only had to stay in China but also had to live and work in the countryside, and some of them decided to stage a resistance. The refugees from southern Vietnam and the large cities in northern Vietnam were particularly reluctant about moving to the rural areas and they led the resistance against the resettlement policy. At a refugee camp in Guangzhou, a group of Chinese from southern Vietnam came into open confrontation with Chinese officials, arguing that since they were not Chinese citizens, they had the right to demand to be sent to a third country. When their demands were rejected, they refused to leave the camp and asked to be allowed to stay in Guangzhou. After they were forcibly moved to the state farms, they escaped immediately and gathered near Luohu in Shenzhen, trying to enter Hong Kong. The Chinese government reacted by sending them back to their farms and by transporting subsequent groups of refugees directly to the farms without passing large cities like Guangzhou (Oral interview, a Chinese from Hanoi, Guangzhou, 12 April 2012).

The failure of their spontaneous resistance to move to the state farms forced many refugees to illegally migrate to other countries. The migration movements rarely took the form of open confrontation with the government, but were more like an underground movement. The leaders of the movements were again the Chinese from southern Vietnam and the large cities in northern

Vietnam. It involved refugees from almost every Overseas Chinese state farm and lasted sporadically for about two decades. As a result of the movements, substantial numbers of Chinese from southern Vietnam and the cities of northern Vietnam left China (Han 2013A). The participation of refugee factory workers from coastal cities like Xiamen, Fuzhou and Quanzhou indicates that even if all the refugees had been resettled in Chinese cities, there would still have been a movement of illegal migrations to third countries, although it is likely that it would have happened at a smaller scale (Peng 2010: 106-107; Lin and Yang 2010: 188-190; Oral interviews, a former employee of the Huaqiao Plastic Factory in Quanzhou, Quanzhou, 13 May, 2012; Oral interview, a former employee of the Huaqiao Plastic Factory in Fuzhou, Fuqing, 10 May, 2012).

Most of those who were not interested in moving out of China or who participated in the illegal migrations unsuccessfully had to stay on the state farms. Some of them were allowed to choose where they wanted to settle, but many were assigned to their farms by government officials. Whereas many would stay wherever they initially settled, some were not happy with the farms they were assigned to and tried to move to other places within China. In Guangxi, some officials initially planned to send the Danjia (Tanka) fishermen from the coastal areas and islands of northern Vietnam to the state farms in other provinces, arguing that Guangxi had taken enough refugees and could not afford to take anymore. However, another group of officials believed that since the ancestors of the Danjia people were mostly from the Beihai region in Guangxi and as most of the Danjia people were fishermen, they should be settled on the coast of Beihai. This latter proposal had the support of the Danjia refugees and eventually also won the approval of the provincial and central governments as well as the United Nations. In 1979, the government designated Qiaogang and Qisha, two coastal areas in southern Guangxi, as settlements for these fishermen. These two places have since become Danjia fishing communities. From 1979 to 1987, over 3000 refugees who had been assigned to farms in other places within China moved to Qiaogang without official permission (Yan 1988: 59; Yi 2011). In fact, Qiaogang has remained the largest Vietnamese refugee community in China.

Many former farmers among the refugees were not satisfied with the farms to which they were allocated and wanted to move to farms located in better places and had better living and working conditions, and some of them succeeded in relocating to other places. In 1978, the Yangxu State Tea Farm in western Guangxi accepted 1289 refugees from Vietnam, and most of them were members of non-Han groups who had been living near the Sino-Vietnamese border. The refugees were not happy there because the farm was located in a remote mountainous region and they were not familiar with tea

cultivation. They then demanded to be transferred to better places. In 1982, the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the State Council decided to move 1120 refugees from Yangxu to Jiangxi Province (Guangxi zhuangzu zizhiqu difangzhi bianzuan weiyuanhui 1994: 130). In Jiangxi, the refugees were resettled in three newly established Overseas Chinese state farms. Although their new settlements were much farther away from their former villages in Vietnam than Yangxu, the refugees were happier in Jiangxi than in Yangxu because the three farms in Jiangxi were all located in plains and were close to major highways (Oral interview, a group of Chinese from Vietnam at the Jinping Overseas Chinese State Farm, Jiangxi, 29 May 2011).

The refugees of the Meizhou Overseas Chinese State Farm in southern Fujian, which was created in 1978 to settle nearly 1000 Vietnamese refugees from Ha Giang, Quang Ninh and other provinces in Vietnam, were not as fortunate as those of Yangxu. Some of the refugees had volunteered to move to Meizhou because maps indicate that the place is very close to the coast. They became very disappointed once they arrived in their new habitat. They found that their farm was situated in a hilly region. There was little flat land suitable for rice cultivation, and there were no trees on the hills, making it difficult for them to find fuels for cooking. Most refugees then decided to leave and they left together secretly. Since their farm was very close to eastern Guangdong and since they perceived Guangdong to be a better place to live in than Fujian, they decided to move southward to Guangdong. After reaching Shantou, the largest city in eastern Guangdong, they were blocked by the bay and a river. As they were looking for the ferry, the officials of Fujian, who had discovered their scheme and had been pursuing them, found the refugees and took them back to their farm (Oral interview, two Chinese from Vietnam at the Meizhou Overseas Chinese State Farm, Fujian, 21 May 2012).

The refugees in Yangxu succeeded in making a move but those at Meizhou failed possibly because in the perceptions of most people, Fujian was much more advanced and prosperous than Guangxi, and therefore the complaints of the refugees in Yangxu would sound more persuasive than those of their counterparts in Meizhou. Besides, Guangdong had already taken over 100,000 refugees, or more than one third of the total number (Guangdongsheng difangshizhi bianzuan weiyuanhui 1996: 223) and it would have been hard for the officials in Beijing to persuade their subordinates in Guangdong to accept any more refugees.

A similar incident took place at a state farm in western Yunnan. Like Meizhou, this farm was established primarily for settling Vietnamese refugees and there were very few returned Overseas Chinese from other countries. It was founded in 1979 and took in 2456 Vietnamese refugees in that year. Most

of the refugees in that farm were from Quang Ninh Province and about half of them did not move to China until 1979. The terrain of this farm is very similar to that of Meizhou. It is very hilly with much dry land but very little paddy field. It is more remotely located than Meizhou. When they first settled on the farm, the refugees had to walk several kilometers of unpaved road to buy necessities from the nearest rural market. The farm was 40 kilometers away from the county seat and 70 kilometers away from the nearest city. Before it was transformed into an Overseas Chinese state farm, the place was actually used for reforming criminals. The refugees felt that it was very hard to adapt to the harsh conditions and, like the refugees in Meizhou, they decided to leave for a better place. Unfortunately, they did not make it as far as the refugees in Meizhou did. Their scheme was discovered by local officials as soon as they began to leave, and the officials immediately blocked the bridge near the farm, which was the only exit to the town (Oral interview, a local official, Changning County, Yunnan, 20 April 2012). After that failed attempt, most refugees decided to settle down at the farm and they are still there today.

Collective actions aimed at relocating to "better" places within the country gradually stopped around the mid-1980s for two reasons. First, the refugees became more adapted to the conditions of their farms as time went on, no matter how miserable the living conditions appeared to be at the beginning; and second, in 1985, the central government issued the Edict No. 26 (Quanguo renda huaqiao weiyuanhui yanjiushi 1998: 415-418), which removed many restrictions on the movement of state farm employees. The policy was part of a nationwide trend of political and economic liberalization. The government permitted or even encouraged those refugees who did not want to stay on their farms to move to cities, or other parts of China, or even foreign countries. The government even provided a small subsidy for those families that were willing to move out of the farms. Those who were the most eager to leave took the opportunity and moved to other places, and only those who were not willing or not able to move out continued to stay in the farms. After that, "moving out" became a matter of individual rather than collective concerns. Meanwhile, as Hong Kong and some Western countries began to adopt less lenient policies toward the refugees from Vietnam, large scale illegal migrations out of mainland China also stopped around the mid-1980s.

Collective Actions Caused by Social and Economic Discontent

The State Council Edict No. 26 issued in 1985 granted the refugees freedom to move and thus gradually ended their collective actions aimed at moving to

other places within China. At the same time, the edict ordered several other drastic changes, including the transfer of the responsibility of supervising the Overseas Chinese state farms from the central and provincial governments to prefectural, county or even township governments; the adoption of the household responsibility system, which replaced the system of collective farming; and the diversification of the economy (Quanguo renda huaqiao weiyuanhui yanjiushi 1998: 415-418). The government also stopped paying salaries to the state farm employees and no longer offered employment to their adult children. The ultimate goal was to eliminate the gap and division between the Overseas Chinese state farms and the surrounding villages. On some farms, such reforms have gone on smoothly and have yielded positive results; on others, the reforms caused some serious problems and much discontent among the residents, who reacted by organizing collective actions aimed at addressing real or perceived social and economic injustice (Han: 2013B). Such resistance is very similar to the rights protection or *weiquan* activities that have been prevalent in almost every part of China in recent years, although the refugees always have their special concerns and like to emphasize their special status as refugees or returned Overseas Chinese. Earlier groups of returned Overseas Chinese raised questions about whether they were refugees or returnees (Ho 2013), but those questions tended to be short-lived. After they settled down in China, they began to see themselves as returned Overseas Chinese and were also treated as returned Overseas Chinese. The migrants from Vietnam are unique in that after living in China for over 30 years, many of them still claim to be refugees, and are still treated as refugees by some government organs (Han 2013A: 37-38).

Since the 1990s, the collective actions of the refugees have focused on social and economic issues, including medical insurance, pensions, compensation for houses that were demolished by the government and land that was requisitioned. Among all the issues, protection of their land rights has been the most important concern, and has been an important cause of some small scale but protracted movements. Most of the time, the targets of the collective actions have been local officials. Leaders and participants of the protest movements tend to believe that the policies issued by the central government are fair and friendly, and their problems and sufferings have been caused mainly by corrupt local officials who do not follow the policies of the central government. They organize themselves into groups and their forms of resistance range from confronting local officials, sending petitions to higher authorities, and dispatching delegates to appeal to higher authorities in person. Although in general their protest and resistance have been peaceful, violent confrontation did occur on some occasions.

One of the teams belonging to the Baise Overseas Chinese State Farm in Guangxi has been in dispute with local officials since 2008 over the compensation for their requisitioned land. Almost all 27 households and over 80 members of the team are refugees from Vietnam and their children. In 2005, local government requisitioned over 1000 *mu* or about 167 acres of land from the team for resettling a group of local farmers whose village had become the site of a reservoir. The refugees were moved from their former settlement to a new site, which is closer to the highway, but has much less land than their former settlement. The government compensated the refugees by providing a payment for the land requisitioned as well as their houses and crops. The state farm built new homes for the team members and bore the bulk of the cost. The farm also provided a small subsidy to help cover the moving cost. The amount and form of the compensation were specified in a document issued by the district government.

The refugees were content with the compensation until 2008 when they discovered another document issued by the municipal government, which prescribed a better compensation package than the one granted by the district government. For instance, according to the document of the municipal government, the compensation for each *mu* of garden land should be 16800 *yuan*, rather than 2224 *yuan*, as granted by the document of the district government. The local officials argued that the document of the municipal government was only applicable to communal land requisitioned for urban development, and since the land of that team was state land rather than communal land, and since it was requisitioned for relocating migrants rather than for urban development, the refugees were not entitled to the higher compensation. The refugees countered by citing a regulation promulgated by the central government in 2005, which stated that the compensation for the land requisitioned from the same district should be the same. They further argued that since some people from their district had been paid according to the standards set by the municipal government, it was not fair to deny them equal treatment.

Since 2008, members of the team have submitted appeals to the leaders of the Baise Overseas Chinese State Farm, the district government, at least six different departments and offices of the municipal government, including the office of the mayor and the office of the Overseas Chinese affairs, the Department of Land Resources of the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region in Nanning, and two ministries in Beijing — the Ministry of Land Resources and the State Bureau for Letters and Calls. Their leaders are a group of middle aged men who were just young boys when they moved to China in 1978. One of them smuggled himself out of Mainland China twice but was sent back to the farm on both occasions. Another leader is the son of an officially

recognized martyr of the state, who served as an interpreter for the Chinese troops attacking Vietnam in 1979 and was killed in the battlefield. To this day their demands have not been met. They have adopted peaceful means to present their complaints and requests, but have been threatened that violence would be used against them if they continue to protest. When three delegates of the team went to Beijing to present their appeals to the two ministries mentioned above, they received a mysterious phone call threatening that they would be killed if they did not stop. They ignored the call and went ahead with the submission of their petition (Oral interview, a group of Chinese from Vietnam, the Baise Overseas Chinese State Farm, Guangxi, 23-24 May 2011).

Two teams belonging to the Wuming Overseas Chinese State Farm in Guangxi have been involved in a similar fight since 2005 to protest against the violation of their land rights. Whereas the team in Baise made the officials in the local government their primary targets, the farmers of the two teams in Wuming blamed the leaders of their farm, who requisitioned their land in 2005. The farmers argued that since they had signed a 15-year land use contract with the farm in 2000, the leaders had no right to requisition their land before 2020. However, in the contract there is a clause stating that if the farm land has to be used for construction, the state has the legal right to demand the farmers to return the land. The farmers further complained about the meager compensation they received for their land. In their letter of appeal to the leaders of the farm, they demanded that the farm officials made regular reports to the farmers about the use of the funds derived from the requisitioned land and that the officials granted the farmers the right to protest against and stop the forced requisition of their land. The forced requisition did occur and the farmers tried to forcibly stop it but unfortunately they failed. Two officials threatened that the farmers would be "expelled" if they did not cooperate (Oral interview, a group of Chinese from Vietnam at the Wuming Overseas Chinese State Farm, Guangxi, 15 May 2011).

In another case, the former refugees in an Overseas Chinese state farm in Jiangxi have filed complaints against the leader of their division. They described him as a corrupt official, who illegally sold the land of the farm, habitually embezzled funds of the farm, and practiced "racial discrimination" against the refugees, causing one refugee to be starved to death and several others to leave the farm (Oral interview, a group of Chinese from Vietnam, Jiangxi, 22 June 2011). Their complaints went unheard and the higher authorities took no action against the division head.

The most violent confrontation between the refugees and the local officials took place in the Yinghong Overseas Chinese State Farm in northern Guangdong in 2009. According to the official report, the confrontation started when the police arrested several former refugees of the Yinghong Township for

engaging in illegal fund raising, which was the first step of their protest movement. The relatives of those arrested then mobilized over 300 people to gather in front of the police station, demanding the release of those arrested. The ensuing conflict caused several injuries and the destruction of a few vehicles (Yin and Ning 2009). The incident drew the attention of former refugees in different parts of the country. Like the cases that have occurred in other places, the protestors in Yinghong also listed the corruption of local officials and the violation of their land rights as their major complaints. Violent confrontation of smaller scale occurred in other places. In the Guangming State Farm near Shenzhen, a certain Mr. Su threw a Molotov cocktail at the police, while trying to prevent his house from being demolished; and he had the support of many of his refugee neighbors (Li 2011).

Understandably most of the time only issues causing communal dissatisfaction are likely to ignite collective actions. Many Vietnamese Chinese do not like the strict family planning program of China and are bitter if they have to pay fines for their "extra" children, but such fines have only caused discontent among the affected families and they have rarely led to communal protest. In recent years, many young men from the refugee communities have married women from Vietnam, but it is impossible for their Vietnamese wives to acquire Chinese citizenship, which has caused much inconvenience for them. Many of them have been complaining about China's citizenship policy, though their discontent has not caused any collective actions. On the other hand, issues such as land rights, pensions, and medical insurance, aroused the concerns of many people and led to collective protest or appeal.

On many occasions, the protestors attached great importance to drawing media attention, and in a few cases, they were efficient in winning the sympathy of journalists. In a state farm in Yunnan, former refugees who lived in shabby houses invited a TV crew from the provincial capital to visit their homes during a rainy day. The live television news report about their leaking houses exerted much pressure on the local officials, who immediately began to help the refugees renovate their houses (Oral interview, two Chinese from Vietnam, Binchuan County, Yunnan, 23 April 2012).

Factors Prompting and Sustaining Collective Actions

Various factors have been cited to explain the rise of collective actions among the refugees from Vietnam. Some Chinese officials believe that the harsh years the refugees spent in Vietnam before moving to China is an important contributing factor. The Chinese in Vietnam lived through the long Vietnam Wars, and they are survivors who are used to fighting and taking risky actions. Although

Chinese from Indonesia and other countries also had to deal with difficult issues and live through hard times, they probably did not experience as much hardship and violence as the Chinese in North Vietnam did.

Others emphasize the importance of the political training and experience the Chinese in North Vietnam had received before entering China. From the late 1940s to the early 1970s, the North Vietnamese government treated the Chinese community in North Vietnam with special respect and offered them special rights in order to solidify Sino-Vietnamese friendship and alliance. The Chinese in Vietnam, even those who were not Vietnamese citizens, were granted full citizenship status and rights. They could join the Vietnam Workers' Party, the Communist Youth League, and those in large cities were permitted to have their own organizations. Many Chinese received political and military training and became officials in the government or officers in the army during this period. These officials and officers served as leaders of the Chinese community in Vietnam and later the refugee community in China and their experience in Vietnam made it easier for them to adapt in China since the two countries had very similar political and economic systems. Some of them would become leaders of collective actions.

The inadequacy the refugees discerned in China's policies and conditions gave the Chinese from Vietnam strong motivations to put their political experience into efficient use. Their dissatisfaction derived from the problems they came across in their new settlements as well as real and perceived gaps that existed between themselves and their reference groups in Chinese cities and other countries. Some of them believed that foreign, particularly Western, governments as well as the United Nations offered the refugees better treatment than those provided by the Chinese government. They tended to believe that within China the distant central government was more generous toward the refugees than the local government. Their dissatisfaction with the different levels of government served to fuel their political actions.

The changing international responses to the refugee crises in Southeast Asia had strong influences on the refugees' attitude toward China. Before the late 1970s, very few countries other than China were willing to take the Chinese from Indonesia and other Asian countries (Peterson 2012: 334-335; 338-339), and partly because of that, many Chinese from these countries felt lucky and even grateful when they were able to move to China to escape the persecution in their countries of residence (Xie 2010: 151; Bu 2010: 124; Yang 2005: 20). However, by the late 1970s, many other countries had opened their doors to Asian refugees. The refugees from Vietnam were aware that they were not just returned Overseas Chinese, like the Chinese from Indonesia and other countries were, but also refugees, which meant they could expect assistance from

not only China, but also other countries, and that they could resettle not only in China, but also in countries more advanced than China. This perception played an important part in prompting the Chinese from Vietnam to take a less obedient stand in dealing with the host government and society. Though some migrants from Vietnam no longer like to be called refugees, others have tried hard to hold onto the refugee identity almost 30 years after they entered China. According to a survey, among the migrants from Vietnam who now live in a state farm in northern Guangdong, over 95% were still emphasizing their status as refugees in 2006 and 2007 (Kong 2010: 44).

While knowing that moving to China was not their only option, many refugees from Vietnam did not see China as the best destination. Some would complain about China when they learnt that their relatives and friends in other countries were living better lives. Moreover, they knew that the United Nations had allocated money for their resettlement and therefore did not see China as the only benefactor. In fact, some of them believed that the Chinese government did not redistribute all the money it had received from the United Nations for resettling the refugees. Such beliefs prompted many of them to complain and protest. Some Chinese scholars have commented on the "refugee mentality" of some refugees from Vietnam who believed that they deserved special treatment simply because they were refugees and would complain and protest whenever they failed to receive special care. Such mentality was clearly manifested in the following remark made by the son of a refugee: "According to the official policy, since my father is a refugee, I am certainly also a refugee. Even the United Nations has said that we are refugees. We were expelled by the Vietnamese government, and we are refugees, not ordinary Overseas Chinese. Now that they (the state farm and the government) do not provide aid for me, I have no other option but to wait to be starved to death" (Kong 2010: 49-50).

An important factor behind the collective actions of the refugees is their communal ties and spirit. Unlike Chinese from Indonesia and other countries, who were resettled as individuals, individual families, or small groups, Vietnamese refugees were resettled as small communities. Members of the same Vietnamese-Chinese village or community would leave Vietnam together and after entering China they demanded, and were often permitted, to stay together, with their former social organization remaining almost intact. A good example is the Qiaogang Township in Beihai City of Guangxi, the largest Vietnamese-Chinese settlement in China. Most of the refugees living there are former Danjia fishermen from some small islands in the Tonkin Gulf, and they were a nomadic maritime group that had been living on fishing on the coast of southern China since ancient times. In Vietnam, they formed their own communities and had their own leaders. In 1978, the entire

community moved back to China and the leaders of the community were able to maintain their positions. Mr. Huang Guoxiong was the director of the bureau of fishing industries of a county under Haiphong city while he was in Vietnam and was the highest ranking former Vietnamese official among the refugees in Qiaogang. After settling in Qiaogang, he served as the leader of the refugee community for nearly 15 years and played an important role in organizing fishing production in the early years. His successor Zhong Yinglun was the head of a fishing cooperative in Vietnam and had served as Huang's deputy since entering China (Yi 2011: 79-80).

To this day the Beihai municipal government still upholds the rule that the positions of the director and deputy director of the Qiaogang Township must be held by refugees from Vietnam. Such organizational continuity, together with the large size of the Qiaogang settlement, can help enhance efficiency in coordinating production, negotiation and protest. On some state farms, the refugees are permitted to form their own teams or divisions with fellow refugees as leaders, making it easy for them to organize collective actions. On one farm, the officials were worried that the refugees would become difficult to manage if they were allowed to stay together, so the farm deliberately dispersed the refugees into different teams so that they would live among the non-refugees (Oral interview, a resident of the Xinglong Overseas Chinese State Farm, Hainan, 6 June 2011).

The informal networks among the refugees have also served to ignite and sustain collective actions. The number of Chinese from Vietnam is far larger than that of returned Overseas Chinese from Indonesia or any other country and the awareness of the size of their community helps boost the confidence of the organizers of collective actions. Though dispersed into different provinces, the refugees have maintained close contact with one another and they expect and sometimes do receive help from fellow refugees in other places. When the protestors in the Yinghong State Farm in northern Guangdong began to confront the police on 23 May 2009, one Vietnamese Chinese in Yinghong made a phone call to his friends in another farm in northern Guangdong asking for support. The friends soon spread the message to other migrants in their settlement. Sixteen men then decided to go to Yinghong to show their support. They drove to Yinghong in two cars and after arriving there they immediately joined the fighting. Three of them were later arrested by the police (Oral interview, a group of Chinese from Vietnam in an Overseas Chinese state farm in northern Guangdong, 25 June 2011). Those who lived in faraway places could not get to Yinghong but many of them followed the events closely by checking their emails and by offering moral support to their fellow refugees in Yinghong. On some occasions, information exchanged through informal networks became

an important cause of collective actions. When refugees on one farm learnt, through informal networks, that they had been denied some benefits that had been offered to migrants on other farms, they would file their grievances.

The conflicts between the migrants from Vietnam and the local villagers around their farms have also served to solidify the group solidarity of the migrants and prompted them to take collective actions. The status of the refugees from Vietnam in China is very similar to that of the “national refugees” in numerous European countries in the twentieth century (Gatrell 2013: 260-261). They were all people who had migrated back to their ancestral land. In both China and Europe, the return of the “national refugees” caused competition and conflicts between the refugees and the local residents. There were frequent disputes between the state farms and neighboring villages over land rights and other issues. Since the villagers usually were superior to the refugees in numbers, the latter had to stay close together to defend themselves. In Guangxi, from 1978 to 1987, local villagers seized 140,000 *mu* of land from the 21 Overseas Chinese state farms and caused an additional loss of nearly 4 million *yuan* in property damage. In some areas, local officials took the side of the villagers, generating much resentment among the refugees. Some even see such conflicts as an important cause of the illegal re-migrations of the refugees from Vietnam (Zeng, Chen and Zhang, 1988: 25; 27).

A Vietnamese Chinese intellectual argues persuasively that another reason why the refugees from Vietnam are less obedient than the Chinese from Indonesia and some other countries is that the refugees from Vietnam moved to China at a different time. Chinese from Indonesia and other countries moved to China before or during the Cultural Revolution, when people were taught to completely eliminate or suppress selfish ideas and when there was little freedom of expression. They were taught, trained and forced to obey orders. Despite these unfriendly conditions, collective actions were not completely absent among other Overseas Chinese groups in the 1960s and early 1970s. Cai Jindui, a former director of the Zhuba Overseas Chinese State Farm in Fujian recalls that in early 1962, the officials in charge of Overseas Chinese affairs in the Fujian provincial government learnt that the returned Overseas Chinese in Zhuba had complaints about the living conditions and climate of their farm and did not want to become farmers. They had organized themselves and decided to send delegates to Beijing to present their demands and to hold a demonstration in the county seat on the National Day. The provincial government immediately sent Cai and another official to Zhuba to deal with the crisis, and the two successfully pacified the Zhuba residents (Chen Yiming 2010: 19-21). In 1964 and 1965, some Zhuba residents sent delegates to Beijing to ask for permission to return to Indonesia but failed to get approval (Chen Yiming

2010: 84-85). The refugees from Vietnam entered China in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution and at the beginning of the reform era, when China was becoming more and more open and when people were gaining more and more freedom. In other words, the Vietnamese were less obedient not only because their experiences and qualities were different from those of the other groups, but also because China in the late 1970s and after, was very different from the China from the 1950s to the 1970s. The new political environment permitted the rise of collective actions, especially if they stayed peaceful.

Conclusion

It is difficult, if not impossible, to prove that the Chinese from Vietnam were, and are, indeed more rebellious than the Chinese from elsewhere. Although the Vietnamese Chinese community possesses some special features that might make them more inclined to take collective actions than some other groups, their expression of collective grievances would not have been possible if they had arrived and lived in China during the Mao years. The factors that prompted the refugees from Vietnam to take collective actions have also driven other groups in China to resort to organized protest during the reform era. The rise of the collective actions of the migrants from Vietnam cannot be separated from the changes of the general social and political conditions of China.

The two major categories of collective actions taken by the refugees from Vietnam roughly conform to the two stages of their adaptations to life in China. In the first stage, their primary goal was to find an ideal place for rebuilding their homes. For the most ambitious members of the community, their first choice was countries and regions that were more advanced than mainland China, and their second choice was the cities in China. They found resettlement on rural state farms hard to accept. However, there were also members of the community who were content with life on the state farms from the very beginning. By the 1990s, most refugees had settled down. Some had moved to countries or regions outside Mainland China or cities in China, and some had accepted the state farms as their permanent homes. The government had granted them the freedom of movement by then.

Their resettlement occurred during a period when rapid social and economic reforms were drastically changing all of Chinese society as well as the state farms in particular. This caused difficulties and dissatisfaction for some members of the refugee community, giving rise to the second category of their collective actions. They protested against the encroachment on and forced requisition of their land, they demanded equal compensation for their land,

houses and crops that were taken by the government or companies, they fought against the corruption of officials and to protect or gain pension, medical insurance and other benefits that they believed they deserved, and they also voiced their complaints about not being granted the special treatments that they thought they deserved as refugees and returned Overseas Chinese.

The effects of the two categories of collective actions are somewhat different. The movement aimed at reaching an ideal site of resettlement was quite successful in the sense that many participants were able to leave the state farms and settle in other countries and regions, as well as Chinese cities, and that today most refugees have permanently settled down and are no longer involved in organized migrations. The success is at least partly owed to nationwide reforms, which removed major restrictions on the movement of people within the country.

The collective actions aimed at redressing social and economic grievances have been less successful, at least in the short term, due to some serious weaknesses. Unlike the illegal migrations, which were a national movement involving refugees from almost every state farm, protests caused by social and economic discontent were usually small-scale and sporadic movements involving limited groups of people. It is hard for the participants to gain substantial support from the local people and refugees in other parts of the country. If the movement of illegal migrations were organized by the most educated and wealthy members of the refugee community, then the participants of the rights-protection movements were primarily the less privileged and poorly educated members of the community, many of whom were lacking in leadership skills. The illegal migrations succeeded sometimes because their secret nature deprived the government of any chance to act, but it is impossible for any rights-protection movement to succeed without winning official attention and support. The lack of capable leaders and local connections made it very difficult for the refugees to attain the official support they needed. Although individually most small-scale protests failed to yield immediate favorable results, collectively they drew the attention of both the government and populace, and on some occasions prompted the central government to issue policies that served the interests of the refugees.

The transition from the collective actions aimed at reaching an ideal place of resettlement to rights-protection collective actions signals an important step forward in the assimilation of the refugees into Chinese society. Some participants of the illegal migrations have argued that they made great efforts at moving out of China because they wanted better opportunities and better lives, not because they did not love China, but their actions show clearly that they did not consider China their permanent home. The beginning of the "rights

protection" collective actions indicates that their participants have decided to live in China permanently and want to live better lives within, rather than beyond, China. The shift from illegal to legal means also reflects their gradual adaptation to and recognition of China's political and economic system. They are fighting for similar causes that have prompted many other Chinese to act. On some occasions, their actions are supported by local Chinese and Overseas Chinese who have returned from other countries; but overall, their failure in winning the support of local Chinese has been a fatal weakness for most of their protest movements. They have attached too much emphasis to their special identity as refugees or returned Overseas Chinese and to the argument that since they are refugees and returned Overseas Chinese, they deserve special treatment, making it difficult for other Chinese to sympathize with them. This is one of the most important reasons for the small scale and low success rate of their collective actions.

Most recently, the central government has adopted a series of social and economic policies aimed at solving the common problems of many refugees, which will certainly reduce the number of collective protests staged by the refugees. The changes the refugee community has been going through will also help reduce the number and scale of the protests. The middle-aged men and women, who have formed the backbone of the protest movements, are quickly approaching retirement age, and once they pass that age, they will begin to receive pensions, thus removing an important source of grievance. Many young members of the community have left for cities and other places and have married outside the community, and for all practical purposes are no longer full members of the refugee community. It is reasonable to predict that the heyday of collective actions of the refugees has already passed. In the future, as they are becoming more and more assimilated, the refugees are more likely to have shared concerns and take joint actions with non-refugees.

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