

Vietnamese boat people crisis in Hong Kong

1975 – 2000

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Vietnamese boat people (VBP)

- Causes:
 - Escape persecutions by the communist regime
 - Ethnic cleansing of Chinese-Vietnamese
- Statistics:
 - 840,000 VBP arrived in neighbouring countries
 - 1 out of 3 VBP perished
 - 2 out of 3 boats were attacked by pirates

VBP - Escape Routes

- South China Sea to South East Asia – small fishing boats with engines
- Gulf of Tonkin to Hong Kong - ancient Chinese design junks



South China Sea



Hong Kong Harbor

Escape routes from Vietnam

Estimated distance from Vietnam
(in Nautical Miles)

- to Malaysia: 550 nm
- to Hong Kong: 620 nm
- to Indonesia: 650 nm
- to Thailand: 700 nm
- to Philippines: 900 nm
- to Australia: 2800nm



Australia

VBP – a Global crisis

Involved: Host countries (first port of asylum), Settlement countries, the UNHCR, Financial supporters, the Rescuers, and NGOs

VBP Arrivals

	Arrivals of VBP (number)	Arrivals of VBP (%)	Resettlements	Repatriations
Hong Kong	213,000	26.8%	143,000	66,696
Indonesia	121,708	15.3%	111,876	12,672
Malaysia	254,495	32%	248,781	9,130
Philippines	51,722	6.5%	49,559	2,502
Thailand	117,321	14.7%	108,121	11,751

VBP Resettlements

Countries of Resettlement	VBP	Orderly Departure Program	Total
Australia	108,808	46,711	155,519
Canada	100,012	60,285	160,297
France	21,421	19,264	40,685
Germany	15,489	12,067	27,556
United Kingdom	19,329	4,842	24,171
United States	402,382	458,367	860,749
TOTAL	717,918	623,509	1,341,427

VBP crisis in Hong Kong

1975 - 2000

- 213,000 Arrivals, 143,000 Overseas settlements, 67,000 Repatriations & 1,400 Local settlements
- First Influx: during the first half of 1979 – 69,000 arrivals
- Second influx: during the second half of 1989 – 34,000 arrivals

General information about Hong Kong (in 1975)

- One of the most densely populated places in the world
 - land area: 1,059 square kilometres
 - population: over 5.5 million
 - overall density: 4,487 people per square kilometre (3.2 in Australia and 22 in the US)
- Lack of natural resources

The Challenges

- Constant arrivals – 500 plus per day
- Lack of space
 - Temporary accommodations: military camps, industrial buildings, hospital, prisons, government dock-yard and ferries
- Monsoons
- Difficulties in finding settlements (35% arrivals vs 12% departures)



Military camp

Industrial Building





Government Dockyard

The Challenges

- ECVII - Ex-China Vietnamese Illegal Immigrant
- Illegal traffic in human cargo: *Huey Fong, Skyluck, Sen On*
- Riots & disturbances in the camps
- Violent between North and South Vietnamese



Skyluck

Huey Fong



The Challenges

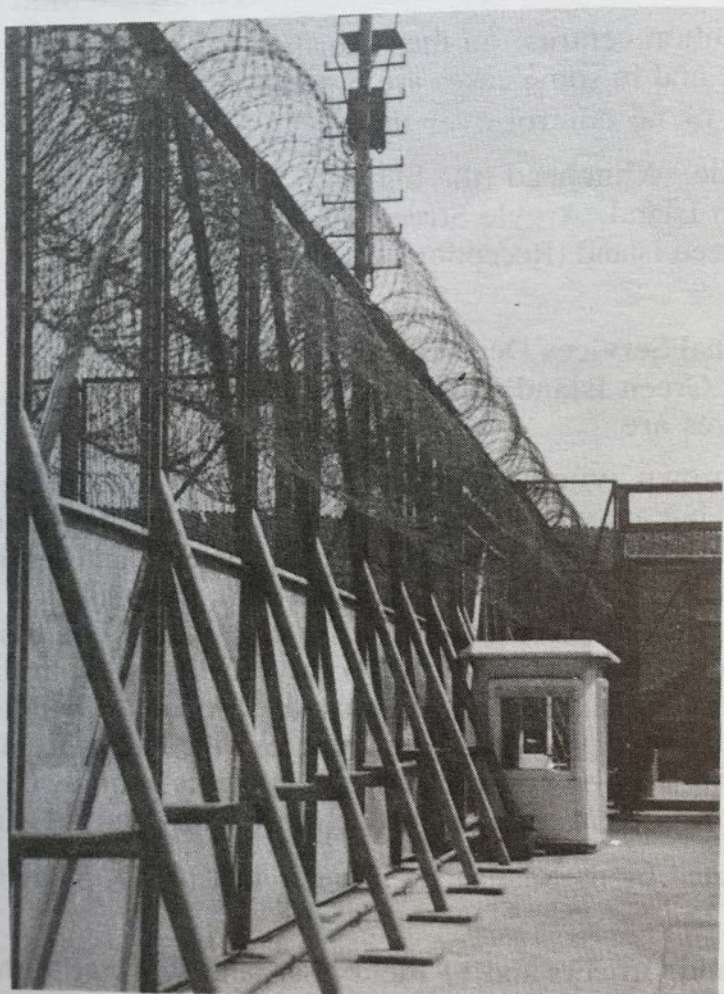
- Local and International community outrages
- Appeals and Legal challenges lodged by the VBP
- Complex repatriation schemes

The Challenges

- Using up local resources
- Financial burden – HK\$ 7.8 billion plus HK\$ 1.16 billion unpaid debt from UNHCR

The Challenges for VBP

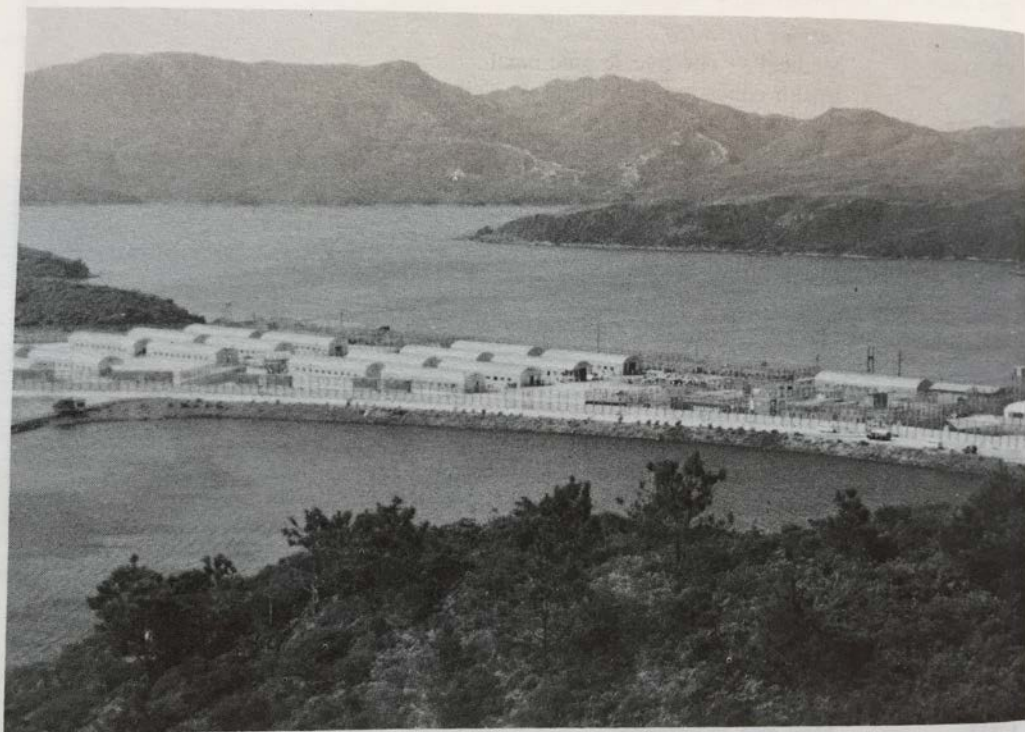
- Psychologically & emotionally vulnerable
- Poor camp conditions
- Long detention in prison-liked camps
- Lack of communications with the outside world



*A Detention Centre
(High Island)*

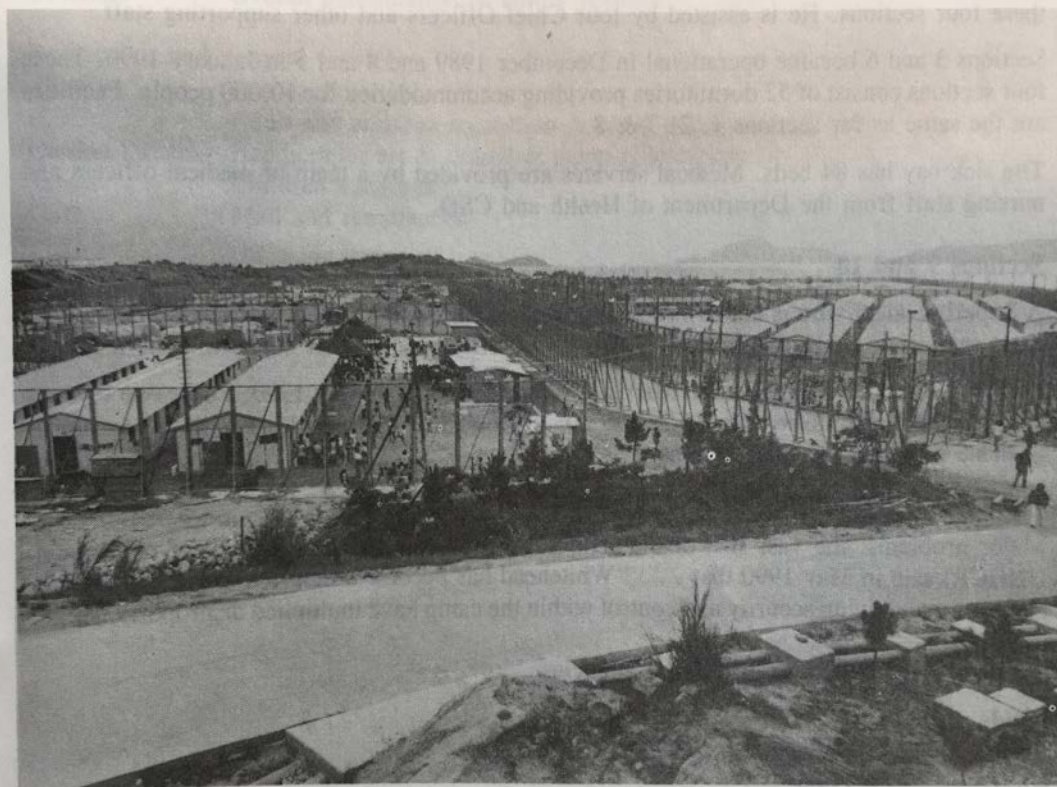


Detention Camps



High Island

Accommodated 25,000 VBP



Whitehead

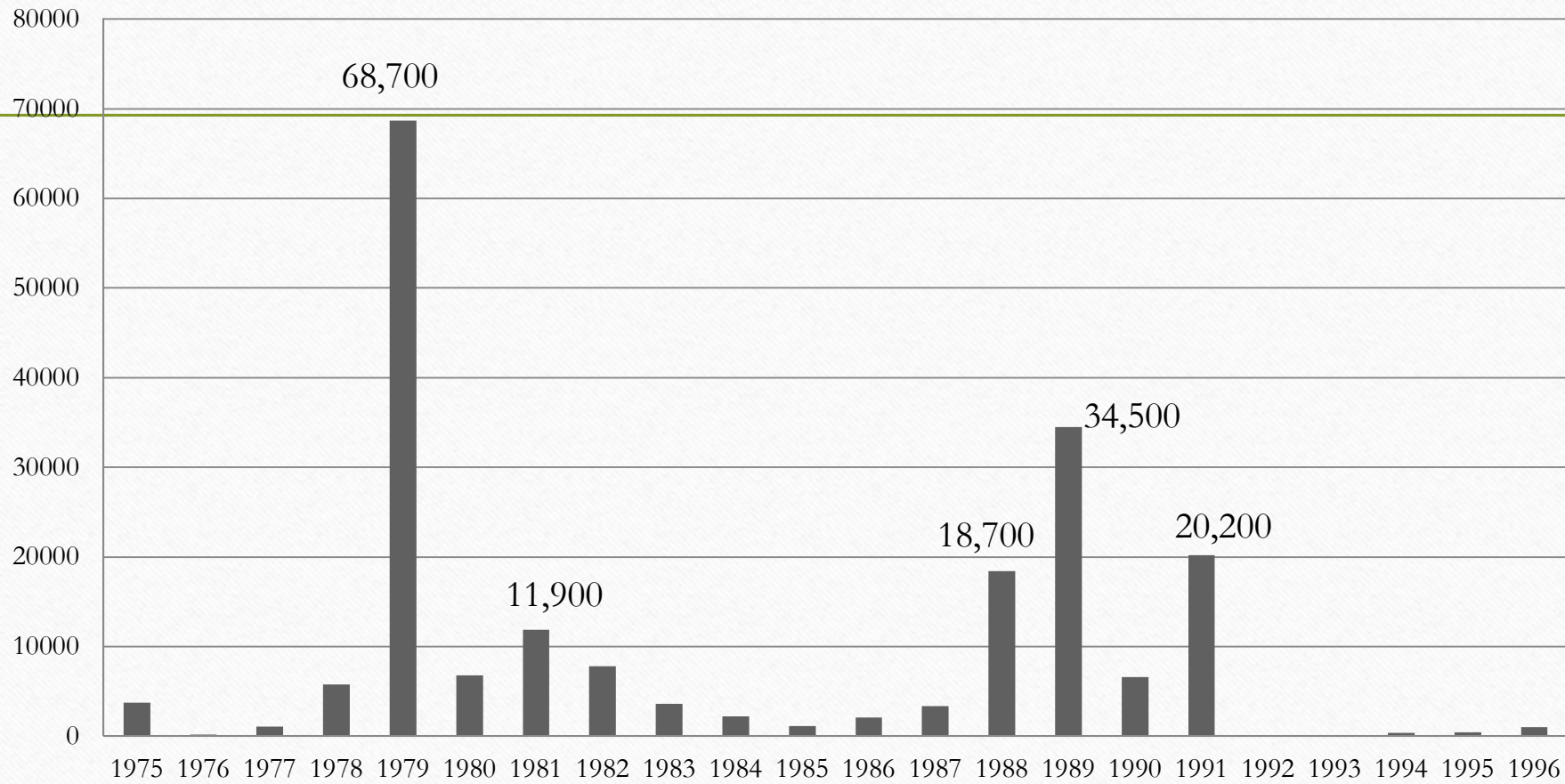
The Challenges for VBP

- Have nothing to do with their time
- Being bullied & Exposed to violence
- Constant weapons search
- Fear of repatriation

Deterrence Measures

- 2 July 1982 - Closed camp policy
- 16 June 1988 - 'Cut-off date', Screening & Detention policy
- Dec 1989 – Forced Repatriation Program

VBP Arrivals in Hong Kong



Geneva Indochinese Refugees Conference 1989

Comprehensive Plan of Action (CPA)

- Reducing clandestine departures through information campaigns and legal migration (ODP)
- Providing first asylum to all asylum seekers until their status had been established
- Resettling those found to be genuine refugees in third countries

CPA – the framework to resolve the VBP crisis

- Determining the refugee status of all asylum seekers in accordance with international standards and criteria
- Repatriating those found not to be refugees and re-integrate them in their home countries.

Observations

- From former VBP: *Grateful that the Government accepted them and did not push them back to sea.*
- People who had first-hand experience with the administration of the VBP crisis: *They learned a lot from the experience and they were proud that HK did not send any VBP away.*

Conclusion

“The VBP crisis is a testament to HK people’s essential resilience and tolerance. HK showed the world that these huge migrations can be handled humanely.”

former British HK Government Security Bureau Official

Stories of the boat people in Hong Kong

Website: <http://vietnameseboatpeople.hk/>

THANK YOU!