

An Ethnographical Study of Vietnamese Migrants in Multicultural Australia:

The Reality

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The experiences of Asian migrants to Australia vary depending on their length of resettlement. For example, among Vietnamese migrants, first-generation migrants are mostly refugees who came following the Vietnam War approximately twenty-five years ago. Since then, the social welfare institutions established under Australia's multicultural policy have resulted in a concentration of Vietnamese migrants in the western suburbs of Sydney. The public's stereotypical image of Vietnamese views them as destructors of social stability.

Among the Vietnamese migrants, cultural differences between those from the North and those from the South have resulted in distinct communities amidst residential suburbs. Furthermore, among ethnic Chinese people from Vietnam are affluent entrepreneurs, so there is the potential for tension between Vietnamese migrants and Chinese-Vietnamese.

While Vietnamese-Americans are psychologically pressed to become American citizens, Vietnamese-Australians sometimes enjoy their identity even as Australian-Vietnamese. However, most of the Vietnamese migrants who have experienced life in Australia prefer to stay there, not only because of its political democracy, but also because of the daily freedom away from the traditional kinship ties in their home country.

Nowadays there are second- and even third-generation adult Vietnamese-Australians in Sydney. Tension within Vietnamese families is generally observed between the older generation and the younger ones, and between parents and children, wives and husbands. However, recent conflicts between parents and children can be resolved when children, with their flexibility to adapt to the duplicate cultural situation, play as "actors" to "negotiate" with their parents. In some cases, parents learn English from their children's conversations. Children serve as an "entrance" to Australian culture for their parents, and thus the older generations are also gradually integrated into the Australian way of life.

A transformation in power relations is also apparent in the gender relationship within families. Vietnamese women find it easier than men to get jobs of various kinds in Australia, and women can hold more sway and influence based on this economic foundation. While most women derive satisfaction from living in Australian society, older men are liable to resent their marginalized positions in the family. Such people gather together to form political organizations critical of the present dominant political parties in their home country (long distant nationalism). Asserting such a standpoint through this movement partly functions to restore their identity and symbolic influence within the Australian-Vietnamese community.