Vietnamese Ethnic Identity
And Food In Canberra.

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Declaration

Except where otherwise indicated this thesis is my own work.

J.L. Fisher
December 1987
Acknowledgements

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$13 \omega \times 34 \times 10^5 + 120 = 46,400$

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Preface

In this thesis I describe two key symbols of Vietnamese ethnic identity in Canberra, namely flag and family where flag represents the Vietnamese love of homeland and commitment to continue the struggle for freedom, and family relations between kin based on generosity and reciprocity coupled with unquestioned authority and respect for elders. These are markers of ethnic distinctiveness deployed by Vietnamese to distinguish themselves from the Anglo-Celtic majority and other minority groups arriving in Australia from Indochina. I examine how the collective and particularistic aspects of both are worked out through the commercial production and presentation of food - an "authentic" cultural product - marketed by Vietnamese restauranteurs in an Australian context.

The Vietnamese are by no means the first Australian minority to take advantage of distinctive cuisine to rebuild familial self-respect after migration, and so reinstate order and meaning in their lives. A cursory glance at the inexpensive restaurants and food outlets in any Australian capital city indicates a disproportionate number of establishments run by families of Australia's migrant minorities. Moreover the last two decades have seen so-called "ethnic" food enjoy previously unknown popularity.

Somewhat surprisingly the food industry in Australia has not received commensurate attention from researchers interested in ethnic issues. However Australian researchers are not alone here. Ethnic food's symbolic load is a generally neglected aspect of community formation in complex, urban societies [Bennett 1975; Glazer and Moynihan 1975; Delmos Jones 1983]. This is despite the fact that ethnic restaurants are manifestly a response to culture contact, and as I show below food is the articulation of ethnicity as cultural form and economic interest. Australian researchers have tended to frame scholarly intent in terms of official guidelines and white, Anglo-Celtic majority perceptions of ethnicity [DIEA 1982]. They engage in largely quantitative analysis which treats ethnicity functionally and as a variable contributing, for instance, to successful resettlement [Viviani 1984; Frieze 1986; McKenzie 1986]. These studies give scant attention to Vietnamese definitions of ethnicity, and consequently cannot relate these folk conceptions to the structural position of Vietnamese in Australian society.
This thesis examines Vietnamese definitions of their identity in the light of Vietnamese migrants' position in contemporary Australia. I grapple with the problem of cultural consciousness and ethnic identity from a Vietnamese viewpoint, through examining the particular ethnic identity constructed by Vietnamese restauranteurs and portrayed in their food. As ethnic mediators the restauranteurs provide an important link between the Canberra Vietnamese community and the Anglo-Celtic majority. They are therefore in a position to significantly affect the public management of Vietnamese ethnic identity, as they interpret to more isolated compatriots their sense of Vietnamese standing in Australian society. Nevertheless it needs to be borne in mind that the restauranteurs' viewpoint is but one Vietnamese perspective on Vietnamese ethnic identity.

My research adds an anthropological contribution to the expanding literature on Vietnamese settlement in Australia, and throws light on the importance of the Vietnamese family and business to the construction and perpetuation of Vietnamese ethnic identity. Additionally the thesis raises issues of broader interest to all migrant minorities, namely the relationship between culinary aesthetics, power and cultural maintenance in Australian society. The restauranteurs described herein depend on intercultural contact and cultural conversion to market their product, though as the following chapters relate multicultural incorporation threatens the industry's cultural and familial basis.

While traversing the same uncertain path to middle class respectability as other migrants before them [see Choi 1975; Huber 1977; and Soccio 1977], the Vietnamese arrival in Australia is notable in that it coincided with high unemployment here and the political era of multiculturalism. In the Introduction I locate the Vietnamese through an examination of the historical and ideological background to Vietnamese settlement in Australia. This discussion outlines the concept of ethnicity as used by politicians, bureaucrats, social scientists, the Australian public and anthropologists. I consider the incorporation of this notion into Australian government policy as multiculturalism and then address recent rising acclaim for ethnic food in terms of changing expectations of relations between migrant and majority since the Second World War. The ensuing discussion introduces the Canberra Vietnamese community, the place of a self-employed elite within it, and several themes I found pertinent to my urban and occupational fieldwork setting.

During fieldwork I was repeatedly reminded that Vietnam and South Vietnamese society remain important reference points by which migrants orient their lives in Canberra. Thus some consideration of the society from which these proprietorial
families came is a necessary precursor to understanding Vietnamese entrepreneurial behaviour and familial aspirations in the present [see Chapter 1]. Moreover allegiances and divisions from the past spelled out in this chapter find expression in the ethnic identity constructed by Vietnamese in Canberra.

Chapter 2 brings the question of the construction of ethnic identity to the forefront: here I examine the ethnic identity conferred on the Vietnamese by the majority and the collective identity constructed by local Vietnamese organizations. In the process I establish relations of domination/subordination between majority and minority. Majority perceptions are of commonality and homogeneity that purportedly exists between people of the same stock; in addition the majority see refugees as beholden people whose future place in Australian society is circumscribed. The stand taken by local Vietnamese organizations is somewhat different. They support and defend the continuing importance in Australia of the principles and values which underpin flag and family, and exhort the coming generation to “remain true” to these aspects of their heritage. In addition these community associations portray a largely political collective identity constructed around recent political events - a banished and diminished people. However commitment to the collective exile charter highlights other important ideological and economic disparities between Vietnamese.

I pursue the theme of minority/majority power relations further through the analysis of Vietnamese ethnic food. As shown in Chapter 3 food is the medium with which proprietors define and present themselves to the white majority as interesting, knowledgeable and civilized, in fact indispensable to a rich, varied and colourful multicultural Australia. Unique culinary skills empower, distance and enable the restauranteurs to resist cultural domination by the majority. Having said this, the food produced marks the Vietnamese as marginalized people, bowing to the demands of Australian consumers. The majority impose standards on food and service and evaluate these in terms of their own aesthetic preferences. I argue the majority require ethnic products to be authentic, tradition-bound and preserved unchanged since leaving the home country. Ethnic food is effectively elevated to an art form; mystified, divorced from the structural and economic reality of minority group standing in Australian society, and denied status as a human product in the making.

Although prevalent among Australians who savour ethnic food, this view of ethnicity has little in common with views held by Vietnamese profiteers [see Chapter 4]. While Vietnamese cultural consciousness has been raised by “outsider” patronage, the production of food is grounded in economic reality. Proprietorial
access to unpaid and docile labour is made possible by two “non-economic forms of compulsion” [MacEwen Scott 1986-9], these being Vietnamese expectations of filial piety and ethnic solidarity. Class interests lie behind the deployment of these idioms, and the privileged position of entrepreneurial families built on the exploitation of subordinate kin and the domination of other non-familial Vietnamese. Prosperity is partial, enjoyed by individual families rather than the Vietnamese community as a whole despite the restaurant trade being based on collective Vietnamese knowledge and resources.

While competing vigorously in furthering particularistic economic interests Vietnamese entrepreneurs are constrained by the familial character of their enterprises. Vagaries of the domestic life-cycle and financial constraints (the latter due in large measure to the peripheral nature of the Vietnamese ethnic food trade in Canberra) mean most proprietors must, at some stage, look to their local community for labour and credit. Thus family-based enterprises enhance cooperation and collaboration within the larger compatriot group and thereby play a role in the formation and perpetuation of the ethnic community. Further, threats to Vietnamese ethnic distinctiveness inherent in intercultural contact are countered to the extent that the restaurant is a Vietnamese created space. Within this setting Vietnamese cultural forms - cooking, budgeting, and associated tasks - combine and articulate Vietnamese material culture, social and symbolic orders. Here the young incorporate and realise the implicit sense of these through personal and immediate experience. They come to “know” themselves, and by extension all Vietnamese, as a certain kind of people who structure themselves according to hierarchies of authority and moral obligation. Thus food as productive activity is dependent upon, and keeps alive, the principles of community and family organization that underlie the social institutions of flag and family, and which privilege Vietnamese identity in Australia.

This remains possible while businesses are small and tied to provisioning a single household. Parental expectations however, are for the coming generation to enter professions and businesses where work ceases to be technologically simple or labour intensive [see Chapter 5]. I therefore argue that challenges to Vietnamese ethnic identity come not only from intercultural contact, but from “within” as Vietnamese families restructure along Australian nuclear family lines according to their class aspirations. Nor is it simply individual family units who are the poorer. Transformation to a non-familial mode of production is at the cost of community cohesion and cultural distinctiveness.

Indeed I found young and well-educated Vietnamese re-fashioning Vietnamese
ethnic identity to fit the Australian circumstances. Their actions demonstrate that Vietnamese ethnic identity is a reflexive, inventive dimension of culture contact; in part a matter of ever changing masks and manners [Goffman 1969; Vincent 1974], congruent with the past but also viable in the present and future. A question posed implicitly throughout this thesis concerns the occasions when people don these masks and practice the manners. The data suggest the Australian context - where the Vietnamese presence is conditional and ethnics stigmatized - is central to the situationally engendered solidarity of the Vietnamese business sector [see Chapter 5]. Ethnicity is instrumental in directing attention towards group unity and interests commonly shared by newly arrived Vietnamese, thereby obscuring recognition of exploitation within the migrant community. This mirrors processes which also exist between the majority and minority. The official government policy of multiculturalism diverts attention from the fundamentals of this phenomenon, for as I argue the majority's appetite for ethnic food is part and parcel of domination over the minority.
Introduction

In Australia eating patterns underwent some dramatic changes during the late 1960's and 1970's. These encompassed food itself and more importantly the meaning attached to food and its social environment. Here I argue that changing food presentations were the product of, and reflected, a shift in the Anglo-Celtic majority's perception of cultural diversity and the place of migrants in Australian society. I then consider the Vietnamese community in Canberra and three issues found particularly pressing during fieldwork; namely time pressure and data collection in an urban and occupational setting, language as an instrument of power politics, and the role of urban centres in shaping minority communities.

Anthropologists have long recognised the social and symbolic dimensions of food [Malinowski 1935; Firth 1959; Douglas 1975; Dumont 1970], and certainly in Australia food as a symbol of otherness is firmly established. For instance, Soccio [1977] relates Italian parental concern over the eating preferences of their Australian born children. "The children" he writes, "can eat spaghetti six days a week, but when they are caught eating chips, or a 'pie 'n sauce' they are immediately branded cangurom [kangaroos] [1977-14]." Food is then one aspect of Italian sub-culture in Australia which carries messages about ethnic identity; that is, to follow Douglas [1975-249], it articulates a system of communication where "the message it encodes will be found in the pattern of social relationships being expressed". An instance cited by Huber serves to clarify this point further. Huber [1977-82] describes the tenacity with which Italian farmers in Griffith consumed minestrone every lunch-time regardless of soaring daily temperatures. However the next generation were not satisfied with pasta and minestrone. To their mother's consternation the young women wanted to enter pavlova making competitions [1977-125]. Pavlova is, of course, what Barth [1970-14] calls an overt signal or sign of Australian cultural identity par excellence.

As convenient ways to categorize people food patterns were also being re-evaluated on the Anglo-Celtic side of the ethnic boundary during the seventies. For example, the majority's demeaning stereotype of the "little Greek with the corner deli" underwent a transformation. Delis were reconstructed as specialty
shops and, being the province of food buffs were seen as exciting places of high status. Majority food choices broadened as Australians experimented with the food of others. They began taking to their own tables foods migrant minorities have always been comfortable eating. In brief, there has been a new acceptance and visibility of ethnic identity - expressed through food - which needs to be set against the political circumstances surrounding migration to Australia.

**Australian Immigration and the Advent of Multiculturalism.**

At the end of the Second World War Australia was critically short of the labour needed for establishing an industrial base. In recognition of this need the Chifley Labour Government (1945-1949) introduced Australia's first comprehensive immigration policy, set up the Department of Immigration and turned to Europe to recruit manpower [Kastniz 1984-163]. The following decades were ones of economic growth. Many newcomers arriving during this period were able to establish themselves economically and socially [de Lepervanche 1984-207]. But by the 1970's employment opportunities were drying up. Immigrants looking for jobs met stiff competition from unskilled labour already in oversupply [1984-212].

Martin [1978-78] divides the post-war years into three periods according to the definition governments gave migrants in each phase. In the 1950's and 1960's migrants were expected to assimilate. They were referred to as "New Australians" as if it was only their recentness which set them apart. The label effectively denied the migrant's cultural distinctiveness. However assimilation proved more difficult to achieve than expected; responsibility for this was attributed to the migrants themselves. In the second phase they became known as "people with problems" [ibid]. The processes involved in resettlement were renamed integration - the Assimilation Section of the Immigration Department became the Integration Section - and the expectation that migrants become indistinguishable from Australians abandoned. Bertelli [1975] argues the changes were largely semantic. Migrant leaders believed the new term indicated a shift in emphasis from assimilating individuals to changing existing groups, and threatened "the dissolution of the ethnic community" [Kasnitz 1984-167]. In the third period the offending term was replaced in official language with "cultural pluralism", and retention of distinctive cultural traits accepted as long as this was not at the price of Australian unity.

By the early 1970's many post-war immigrants had become Australian citizens. Their vote was becoming numerically significant and political parties began to court them [de Lepervanche 1984-183]. However some disquieting facts about the position of migrants in Australia were coming to light. For instance, to be a
migrant from a non-English speaking background significantly increased the chance of living in poverty [Henderson 1975]. Equality of opportunity did not automatically reach the next generation either [Jakubowicz 1981-7]. This realization raised serious doubts about the commitment of the second generation to the Australian political system [Grassby 1973]. In 1972 the Labour Election Manifesto introduced the issue of migrant resettlement directly into the national political arena as an election issue [Jakubowicz 1981-5]. The ensuing debate raised questions about "who and what is an Australian" and pushed to the forefront discussion of the form of Australian society in the future [Grassby 11/3/81]. "In the interest of Australians of the year 2,000" wrote Grassby [1973-15], "we need to appreciate, embrace and preserve all those diverse elements which find a place in the nation today".

Grassby’s [11/3/81-4] theme of “building unity out of diversity” assured the place “of culturally diverse groups as established, legitimate structures within Australian society” [Martin 1978-78]. His multicultural philosophy, continued after 1975 by successive governments, moved Australia from an assimilationist/integrationist (ie conformist) view regarding the foreign born towards one guaranteeing “the rights of all people to equality of opportunity and access to services and programmes, and to retain and develop their culture and beliefs only subject to Australian laws” [West; Ministerial Statement to Parliament - 1/11/83]. In brief the three “lynch pins” of the Australian multicultural society came to be seen as cultural diversity, social cohesion and equality [Jakubowicz 1984-43]. (These themes are critically reviewed in later chapters).

Grassby also introduced the term “ethnic” into political rhetoric. In doing so he stressed the derivation of the term from the Greek word ethnos, meaning folk or people. He intended ethnic to “embrace all Australians of all backgrounds” [Grassby 11/3/81-4]. However, as Chapter 3 relates, it has not quite worked out that way. “Ethnic” was perceived to combine equality and dignity with the recognition that cultural diversity continues into successive generations. In keeping with this “national groups” began to be referred to as “ethnic groups” in the 1970’s, while the labels “migrant” and “New” Australian which hinted at impermanence, marginality and depressed lifestyles were dropped.

Cultural diversity - evident in food for instance - was nothing new in Australia. Rather that which had previously been ignored, or seen as suspect, was now officially sanctioned, even encouraged [Zubrzycki 1982-16]. Home-maker guides began to re-instate garlic in recipes calling for Italian tomato sauce. Prior to the late sixties garlic had been determinedly excluded and replaced by chopped
capsicum [Good Housekeeping 1968]. Thus multiculturalism conceded the necessity of some changes being made by the majority where previously all change was expected to come from the migrant quarter. Everyone, according to the Australian Council on Population and Ethnic Affairs,1 would benefit. Multiculturalism was promoted as the means of "creating .... something of value for all Australians" [Zubrzycki 1982-16; emphasis added].

Before examining how the label "ethnic" has been given substance by the Australian government and social scientists, I wish to consider briefly the anthropological meaning of the term and the sense accorded ethnic in various cross-cultural situations. Anthropological input is useful in conceptually teasing out the primordial, cultural and economic bases claimed for ethnicity generally, and facilitates the examination of Vietnamese ethnicity in Australia - as grounded in sentiment, commonality and/or utility - and understanding of the processes involved in Vietnamese ethnic group formation and maintenance.

**Ethnicity: theoretical issues.**

Broadly speaking there are two schools of ethnic theorists - the primordialists and the circumstantialists - although many straddle the divide. The primordialists [Geertz 1963(a); van den Berghe 1981; Barth 1970] conceive ethnic identity to be one of the givens of social existence, arising out of sentiment experienced by way of recognition of ties of blood, speech and custom. Geertz [1963-109] writes "one is bound to one's kinsmen, neighbours, one's fellow believers, ipso facto, as a result not merely of interest, or incurred obligation, but at least in great part by virtue of some unaccountable, absolute import, attributed to the very tie itself". Barth [1970-17] argues that ethnicity is part of a man's "most basic, most general identity", a superordinate status which "cannot be disregarded and temporarily set aside by other definitions of the situation". Thus to the primordial way of thinking ethnic solidarity flows from feelings of natural affinity grounded in a shared past.

However Barth goes further, introducing the idea of social interaction to ethnicity. He writes "ethnic groups are categories of ascription and identification by the actors themselves" [1970-10]. This amounts to a recognition of the flexibility of ethnic boundaries, of their dynamic quality which allows for the passage of some

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1The Population and Immigration Council was established by the Fraser Government in 1977 to advise the Minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs on matters relating to immigration and settlement. Membership was comprised primarily of academics, lawyers and businessmen. In 1981 the Council merged with the Ethnic Affairs Task Force and the Australian Refugee Advisory Council to form the advisory body known as the Australian Council on Population and Ethnic Affairs.
people across them. By moving the emphasis from ethnicity as cultural content to ethnicity as social process, Barth opened up anthropological research to questions of incorporation, exclusion and boundary maintenance.

The circumstantialists [Bennett 1975; Cohen 1974; Wallman 1979] do not dispute the notion of boundaries, but rather their primordial basis. Theirs is a contextual conception of ethnicity, as born out of contact with unlike others in situations where individuals or groups may choose to play up or deny ethnic ties according to convenience or interest. Thus Cohen [1974-125] describes ethnic groups as just one of "the interest groups which compete, quarrel and co-operate in the struggle for power and privilege". Despite the attention circumstantialists like Cohen pay to cultural markers it is difficult to see how in complex, urban situations so-called ethnic groups are distinguished from other pressure or lobby groups. For instance Cohen [1974] treats London stockbrokers as an ethnic group. He writes "city men are as socio-culturally distinct in British society as are the Hausa in Yoruba society. They are indeed as 'ethnic' as any ethnic group can be" [1974-101]. Critics may well ask whether an ethnic identity need be based on "genuine native tradition at all?" [Bennett 1975-6]. Or can it arbitrarily be constructed by people who historically have been separate and distinct - lacking shared history, language, caste or tribe - as Fisher [1978] and Wax [1971] argue for the "Asian Indians" of New York and "Indian Americans" respectively. Certainly much circumstantialist work is empirical. Studies begin from the premise that ethnic groups are real entities and proceed to describe their cultural distinctiveness [Wallman 1979; Ward and Jenkins 1984]. More attention needs to be directed toward what happened in the United States in the last two decades which made it worthwhile to define oneself as an "Asian Indian" or an "Indian American".

In Australia during the 1970's and 1980's ethnicity acquired a meaning quite independent of the "ethnics" view of themselves. The incorporation of the term into government policy (to which I have alluded above) was followed by a rush of political initiatives giving substance to ethnic divisions. Government made provisions for ethnic groups to apply for funds to support activities aimed at promoting or maintaining their languages and culture [West; Ministerial Statement to Parliament - 1/11/83]. "Ethnic" welfare workers were employed under the grants-in-aid scheme, and migrant resource centres extended [Galbally 1978]. The Telephone Interpreter Service was launched in 1973 and ethnic radio in 1975. The institutionalization of ethnicity makes it in every minority group's self interest to highlight aspects of cultural heritage setting it apart from the Australian majority and other minority groups. Thus ethnic groups are in part the product of the workings of state interventions in Australia.
The objectification of ethnicity was further propagated in research by social scientists who use the official view of ethnicity to frame scholarly intent. "Cross-cultural" studies set about developing cultural sensitivity among Australians, particularly those employed in the health and welfare fields [Barker 1982; McKenzie 1982; DIEA 1982]. Difficulties encountered in the delivery of these services to migrants are attributed to cultural difference; ethnicity is used here in an explanatory sense. Much of this research begins, as Jakubowicz [1981-10] points out in regard to the Galbally Report, from the belief that Australia is a democratic, egalitarian society. The problem is phrased in terms of removing disadvantage, and ignores the migrant's structural position in Australian society. One outcome has been for ethnicity, taken "as given", to acquire a "first cause role" [Jakubowicz 1981-5].

The word "ethnic" has also entered the language of everyday discourse and experience. Australians speak of "ethnic food" and patronize "ethnic restaurants" for example. Eipper [1983-44] calls this "self reflexive" ethnicity by which he means the phenomena created, not discovered, by ethnicists and mimicked by the public. The Australian perception, and mystification, of migrant minorities is thus structured using ethnic categories. De Lepervanche [1980-35] makes this point when she writes "there are in fact no ethnics; there are only ways of seeing people as ethnics". This thesis describes the commercialization of those "ways of seeing"; the Vietnamese restaurant trade in Canberra depends on the Australian consumer practising, with government encouragement, multiculturalism. Indeed in advice to the Minister, the Australian Council on Population and Ethnic Affairs recommends that individual members of Australian society participate in multiculturalism for "then and only then does multiculturalism become more than just a reflection of our demographic history or an item of government policy" [Zubrzycki 1982-29].

Introducing the Vietnamese.

By June 1985, and early in my fieldwork, just under 90,000 Vietnamese had entered Australia. The overwhelming majority left Vietnam after the communist victory in April 1975 [Australian Bureau of Statistics: 24/7/86-Table 1] and have
entered Australia as refugees. These people are part of a world-wide movement of Vietnamese, beginning with the evacuation of 131,000 men, women and children with the departing American troops. By July 1979 292,315 mostly Vietnamese nationals had made their way by boat or small craft to South East Asian countries [Grant 1979-54]. The "trickle" of 1975 had become a "torrent" by 1979 [ibid]. Many sought resettlement in Australia, North America and Western Europe but, in the meantime, the countries of first refuge were hard pressed to cope with the influx. Recognising this the United Nations convened the 1978 and 1979 Geneva Conferences to discuss ways of stemming the flow and to elicit international offers of resettlement [Viviani 1984-42]. Today Vietnamese social networks stretch and extend around the globe as those who find themselves in different countries renew and maintain contact with family and friends.

Most of the Vietnamese in Australia are urban dwellers; the 1981 census showed two thirds of their number located in Sydney and Melbourne [ABS 1981 Cat No: 2139.0 Table 1]. They are also of low occupational standing; in 1981 70% were production process workers and labourers concentrated in manufacturing industries [1981-Tables 9 and 10a]. More recent unemployment figures show around a third of adult Vietnamese are without jobs [ABS March 1984 Cat No: 6250.0 Table 13]. Although figures from the 1986 census are unavailable at the time of writing, private discussion with a representative from the Bureau of Statistics indicated little reason to believe that this profile had changed markedly.

In 1985 the Vietnamese in Canberra numbered between 2,500 to 3,000. They came from a society which was highly stratified and divided along the lines of race, religion, region and class [see Chapter 1]. People identified themselves and others by reference to such categories. The recent historical events culminating in

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2 Australia has employed the United Nations definition of a refugee as someone who

"owing to a well founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, and nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence, is unable or owing to such a fear unwilling, to return to it" [DIEA-1985].

Under this definition Vietnamese students stranded in Australia when Saigon fell, and unwilling to return home, qualified for refugee status as did Vietnamese who fled to the camps in South East Asia. It is generally agreed that regardless of the reasons for flight, be they economic or those elaborated above, persecution would almost certainly follow any return to Vietnam. Prior to April 1975 there were also a few Vietnamese resident in Australia whose departure was not prompted by turmoil in Vietnam. Members of this group refer to themselves as "migrants" rather than "refugees". Since 1982 it has been possible to leave Vietnam legally under the Orderly Departure Programme. However, most Vietnamese with whom I spoke viewed the programme skeptically. The paper work can take years to complete and only those people in major cities have access to the relevant government offices. Speaking to Four Corners [11/8/85] in 1985, the Vietnamese Ambassador to Australia pointed out that the Orderly Departure Programme was constantly under review. There was no guarantee, he said, that it would continue in its current form. The programme's fate depended on "developments within the Vietnamese community within Australia". Continuing attacks on Embassy officials would in all probability lead to further curtailment.
flight and resettlement have not markedly changed the pattern. Divisions persist, and superimposed are new lines of tension resulting from migration and resettlement [see Chapter 2]. Nevertheless the Vietnamese in Canberra comprise a community in the sense of sharing cultural affinity and jointly recognising certain values, beliefs and regularities of behaviour. Two local Vietnamese associations reflect the common heritage.

The larger is The ACT Chapter of The Vietnamese Community in Australia or more simply, the Vietnamese Community Association (VCA). It is an umbrella group established in 1979 partially in response to Australian bureaucratic desires to liaise with one representative body. Although set up along Western organizational precepts with office bearers and an Executive Committee, it would be incorrect to assume that the organisation acts as a unified body or holds a common outlook. It embraces several more extreme right-wing sub-groups and the current President, a Major from the South Vietnamese Army deskillled during migration and now "wearing blue", is said to have been a choice acceptable to the various factions but without real influence. The association's role in the cultural, political and entertainment life of the Vietnamese community is described more fully in Chapter 2.

The second association of importance is the Vietnamese Buddhist Association, (VBA) formed in 1984. The association recently appointed a resident monk, and acquired a house in the Canberra suburbs to serve as a focal point for Buddhist activities and as a temporary substitute for a Pagoda. Continuing in the mode of the religious revival of the 1930's [Keyes C.F. 1977-217; Gheddo 1970-171] and subsequent upsurge of anti-Catholic feeling among Buddhists during the Diem era [Smith 1967-236], the VBA holds that Vietnamese Buddhism is "not merely a religious belief that limits itself to its mission as a faith" [Thich Nhat Hanh 1967-44]. On the contrary, local members see themselves as practising "engaged Buddhism", and as having a role to play in the wider domains of community life. To this end the association organises various youth and family programmes at which loyalty to the family and homeland are promoted and resolve strengthened to preserve language, tradition and culture.

Both associations seek funds to support their activities from the well-known and the well-to-do Vietnamese, such as community entrepreneurs and business people. The restauranteurs are generally prepared to contribute but show little interest in joining the ranks of office bearers. Nevertheless the former are people of some note because to open a restaurant represents the return to petit bourgeois status. The restaurant fulfills the "Vietnamese dream" vividly rendered by one informant
"of catching a corner of the market and dominating it". In this economic niche some things can be done the Vietnamese way, removed from overarching Australian institutions. And as managers, innovators and risktakers these entrepreneurs hold within their grasp the means not only to their own domestic group’s livelihood but also to create jobs for other community members. They neither live nor work within a common geographical area, yet are marked off from the larger Vietnamese community by way of their common occupation, a shared way of life where the job itself leaves its stamp on those engaged in it. If not actually acquainted all the Vietnamese restauranteurs in Canberra are aware of, and know things about, each other. Knowledge serves as a source of identity and gives an “urban village atmosphere” of community [Gans 1962-15], in terms of people being connected by a common network of social relations.

Fieldwork.

Before commencing fieldwork I learnt of some of divisions in the Canberra Vietnamese community (detailed in Chapter 2) and so was hardly surprised to find that people generally greeted my initial research proposal in one of two ways. The Vietnamese who have arrived more recently predicted the research would be welcomed as it provided an opportunity for the refugees to “explain” themselves and create a positive image. “The world should know what has happened to us” is a repeated refugee theme. The older residents - a minority - were discouraging about my chances of securing their compatriots’ co-operation. One suggested that as a university graduate I would do better to study Vietnamese graduates. The representative of a government department - an Australian with an Vietnamese “ethnic advisor” as his offsider - was directly critical. He argued that not only would co-operation be unlikely because “the Vietnamese are a tricky bunch”, but my work would stir up trouble: he and his officers would have to handle the questions and anxieties of angry Vietnamese wanting to know what was going on. As far as I am aware this did not in fact happen!

I began fieldwork in April 1985 and continued until January 1986. A sponsor, who came from among the official ranks of the Vietnamese Community Association, contacted the restaurant families on my behalf and escorted me to an introductory meeting where I explained my purpose and negotiated a mutually convenient first appointment. I believe these introductions to have been invaluable. Proper introductions meant at least polite co-operation. And where my sponsor and the family were friends - and politically saw eye to eye - I was immediately welcome.

Ten restaurants and twenty five adults (including some teenagers) gained most of my attention. The families to which the informants belonged also contained
around a dozen or so smaller children, as yet too young to contribute their labour to the business. I collected biographical details from the parents in order to construct profiles of their lives which are included in a chapter on the history of Vietnam. Data from all other discourse have been used selectively to illustrate the salient features of the thematic argument outlined in the Preface. I made no attempt to collect information systematically on profit, expenditure or family incomes. At the onset advisers from the Vietnamese Community Association and Vietnamese Buddhist Association indicated such figures would not be forthcoming, nor as should be clear by now was detailed economic analysis my purpose. Vietnamese are sensitive to scrutiny and criticism from Australians with regard to how they make money and conduct business transactions. Moreover while turning a blind eye to remittances sent to Vietnam the government does not sanction such activity. Thus money - how it is made and how it is used - was a sensitive topic I chose not to probe. Nevertheless where individual proprietors may have been reluctant to reveal their own economic position, other Vietnamese made it abundantly clear which restaurants were doing well and which were failing. Thus a gross, but I am sure accurate, measure of entrepreneurial success was readily available.

I met with the owner/manager at the premises during the quiet times - perhaps mid-morning or mid-afternoon when the place was officially closed but some work was still going on, or in the early evening when the restaurant was open, take-away orders were coming in but not many “in-house” diners. Typically the restauranteur would guide me to a table, push away the bowls, chop-sticks and glasses, offer tea with sugar-coated ginger or “finger foods” like spring rolls, and settle down to talk for a couple of hours until the next rush began. However it would be wrong to imagine a continuous, uninterrupted, flow of dialogue. Obviously business demands were a priority. The restauranteur had either arranged for another family or staff member to handle any “off-peak” work that cropped up, or he/she would jump up to take a booking, handle a delivery or fill a take-away order as necessary. Dialogue came in the form of a number of sequences, broken by other demands or terminated as customers began to trickle in, to be re-opened on another occasion. Inevitably this must have some bearing on meaning which depends at times for its sense on what went before. Yet out of necessity the final text comprises re-ordered or combined sequences that give little clue to the seeming disorder I perceived in the initial dialogue.

From the onset I was always conscious of two somewhat incompatible pressures which had bearing on methods of data collection I decided were appropriate to my urban and occupational fieldwork situation. Firstly, the recent upheavals in these
people's lives has necessitated their filling out hundreds of forms for various authorities and subjecting themselves to many formal interviews. I felt they would find further systematic, fact-finding interviews or questionnaires offputting. And words committed to tape strip away privacy, leaving no leeway for comfortable misunderstanding. Discussion with a Vietnamese adviser confirmed that my anxiety was well grounded. Thus I decided on an informal, conversational style during which I jotted down facts and figures I could not trust myself to remember; family structures and place names for instance. As soon as practical afterwards I wrote up fuller notes.

Even so, I was always aware that time was finite and that the restauranteurs were busy people. To get the most out of the hours available I needed to have in mind a general structure, an idea of those points I wished to raise. This was also an expectation held by participants. Not to have recognised it would have undermined my credibility as a worthwhile student and all that this meant for future co-operation. Yet structure presupposes questions and as Clifford [1980-529] points out "a question initiates an exchange, an answer confers debt". The raw information is a "thing given", not simply stumbled upon or discovered. This thesis is the product of that tension, of the inherent jostling in verbal encounters as the Vietnamese and I came to an agreed upon view of reality.

All of this is very different to living, as do many anthropologists, in a peasant village for months or even years, with the luxury of hours of daily, unstructured contact during which local people can get used to the fieldworker and arrive at a fairly accurate idea of who and what he/she is about. Working with urban Vietnamese I found it necessary to give an immediate and convincing description of my research; my Vietnamese advisers suggested both a "face" and a "line" I should adopt [Goffman 1955].

I should identify myself as from the university and wanting to collect data on two aspects of the Vietnamese cultural heritage, namely Vietnamese food and the Vietnamese family as a unit of production - hence my interest in the restaurant trade which encapsulates both of these. I should stress that knowledge gained was simply knowledge for its own sake, and not for use by any government department. This, the advisers predicted, would ensure co-operation given the Vietnamese respect for education. They were proved correct in regard to the majority of proprietors who have come to Australia since 1975 by way of the refugee camps in South East Asia.

The few Vietnamese Colombo Plan students who remained in Australia after 1975
and with an economic stake in restaurants a decade later were more sceptical about the value of the research. Some felt they personally had little to gain and would jeopardize privacy through unstinting co-operation. They were less enamoured by ideas of post-graduate study, most having PhD's in a "hard science" themselves. For this sub-group both anthropology and a MA were decidedly inferior. Their reaction touches on the larger problem of anthropology having long been associated with the West and imperialism. Even when undertaken in Western societies anthropology has tended to "study down", finding migrant or minority working class enclaves to examine. Former student diffidence could perhaps be interpreted as recognition by members of the more established sections of the Vietnamese community, that they do not belong in this category, nor do they wish to be "lumped in" with it.

Introductions were always made to the owner/manager as the most senior person in the business. I explained I was interested in speaking to every family member. As it transpired restauranteurs differed in the degree of control they imposed. Some encouraged all the family to join in, and also allowed other staff to sit down at the table and contribute. One jealously guarded me, shooing away family and hired help alike. Thus behind shared or group reasons for co-operation in research were other private motives and personal needs requiring my recognition. For my part I was troubled by the issue of reciprocity [Golde 1970], the need to give as well as take from informants. Hence I was glad to be asked to get information from government departments or clarify bureaucratic guidelines. On one occasion my husband was co-opted into helping prepare the business's tax return. And to assuage my feelings of indebtedness I introduced many Australian friends to various restaurants and made sure I ate copious amounts of Vietnamese food as a paying customer.

Mention is made in Chapter 2 of events bringing the Vietnamese Australia-wide media attention in 1985 and in the midst of which my research took place. Suffice here to consider the use of language. Since Malinowski, use of the vernacular has been considered a cornerstone of the anthropological discipline. Learning Vietnamese was mooted but later discarded when the complexity of the language and necessary time commitment showed it an impractical idea in my case. Moreover food is a readily accessible aspect of ethnic identity not bound exclusively to verbal modes of communication. As it turned out my shortcomings proved to be a blessing in disguise. Proficiency in the language would have raised questions about how I had acquired the skill. If I had been to Vietnam a further hornet's nest of reasons and roles would have been opened. On the other hand learning Vietnamese at the Australian National University would have meant participating in a programme out of favour with the sub-group of my interest.
Indeed anthropologists have long recognised that language is in itself a statement about identity and signifies the anticipated or presumed stand to be taken on various issues. Hence Codere's [1970-151] refusal to use Ki-Swahili when working in Rwanda where the tongue is "wholly the language of superordinate-subordinate relationships" between the have's and the have nots, master and servant. In addition I found language an instrument in the politics of the confrontation, used to maintain distance, mystify and protect. A fieldwork incident suffices as explanation. One manager, the son-in-law of an indefinitely interstate proprietor, was understandably anxious about his father-in-law's attitude to participation. To overcome this and free himself so as to become involved in my research the young man used the boundaries afforded by language. He offered apologies saying his English was not up to elaborate conversation, but suggested that were a third person to be found who could interpret all would be well. He nominated the son of one of his father-in-law's closest friends, a Canberra College of Advanced Education student whose English was not appreciably superior to his own. At other times with other informants, my questions were not quite comprehended or answered evasively. In response I must admit to timidity and anxiety about offending the sensibilities of people whose lives have been troubled. However in my own defence I believe I could not expect to be seen as a bland, disinterested other, or a "curiosity" as Fischer [1970-274] describes herself when working in Japan. Rather I was perceived as a representative of the Australian majority, and therefore in a position of domination. Moreover I suggest that there can not but be a political dimension to all knowledge of Vietnamese life gained in Australia. The Vietnamese have apriori reasons for apprehension and an investment in the outcome.

Fieldwork also lent itself to the use of the more orthodox, and often preferred method of anthropology, namely participant observation which frequently has its particular emphasis the visual. Food - approached as a communications system - is one aspect of culture where messages are coded in visual and olfactory symbols. Besides spending time in the kitchen and consuming Vietnamese food I was invited to various celebrations and ceremonies (some of which are described in Chapter 2) where the larger Vietnamese community was in attendance. Here I had the opportunity to "see" the sense the Vietnamese are making out of their recent history for, as Loizos [1981-141] points out in regard to Greek refugees deriving from the 1974 Turkish invasion of Cyprus, "a major political upheaval must be accompanied by some reconsideration of the past, even if in the end people are confirmed in their old prejudices". Vietnamese conversation and gossip called my attention to other things and areas of life the Vietnamese find worthy of notice in each other, further indicating the social order that is returning to their lives. And
through visits to Vietnamese restaurants in Adelaide, Sydney and some Australian country towns I was able to get a close-up, everyday feel for this particular occupational sub-group "at work" in various communities around Australia. I deemed this necessary because as I was repeatedly reminded by social scientists at pains to find "representative" samples, the Vietnamese in Canberra are far from "typical".

Without a doubt Canberra and Sydney have been experienced differently by the Vietnamese as these cities, entities in their own right, have the capacity to shape minority communities. For example, Canberra is unique among the major capitals in terms of allowing immediate movement of Vietnamese into the community without any time in transitory hostels. A Vietnamese from Cabramatta believes people bound for Canberra under the Community Refugee Settlement Scheme miss out. For unlike the Vietnamese who spend their first weeks and months in Australia at the West Cabramatta Migrant Hostel, they do not have the opportunity to share experiences with compatriots; to form friendships which continue into the wider community when families move to a flat or house in the suburbs. Frequently this first home is found in close proximity to the West Cabramatta hostel and therefore a concentration of fellow countrymen are found in the locale. In contrast the Community Refugee Settlement Scheme's housing arrangements aim to disperse Vietnamese throughout the Canberra suburbs. The outcome of these varied resettlement procedures, coupled simply with the greater numbers of Vietnamese in Sydney's eastern suburbs, makes Cabramatta a "real" community in my informant's eyes, by which he means a community with an institutional structure. In contrast he describes the Canberra Vietnamese community as "just a collection of individuals or small groups".

It is true that within the space of a few city blocks in Cabramatta there is an astounding array of shops and services run by the Indochinese for their compatriots. Shop names and scripts advertise the ethnic identity of their owners. Some aim to attract both ethnic Vietnamese and Vietnamese Chinese, or Viet quoc Hoa, by displaying the romanized quoc ngu script introduced by the French and the nom characters, based on Chinese calligraphy, favoured by some Sino-Vietnamese. Others limit themselves to attracting a single migrant group. Food retailers carry not only an Australian range of products but also specialty goods of particular interest to fellow migrants. All keep "Asian" hours, with shops open

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3Viviani [1980-105] makes the same point with reference to both American and Australian data. She believes that on arrival refugees need "a sense of belonging" to derive from a "functioning ethnic group" rather than from the dominant society. Migrant centres are useful in offering "a defacto group which can be linked to outside ethnic groups and facilitate transition from the center to the community".
throughout the weekend. Wedding outfitter, video and cassette outlets, newspapers and at least one night-club cater specifically for the ethnic Vietnamese market. A real estate agent advertises the presence of Vietnamese speaking employees. Chinese and occasionally Vietnamese names appear on the partnership plaques of doctors, lawyers and opticians. Tea houses and coffee shops recreate a popular past meeting place in premises still bearing the mark of earlier Italian and Yugoslav migrants - a southern Mediterranean influence is apparent in the decor and architecture. Shops selling noodle soup (*pho*) do a roaring trade on Saturdays and Sundays, catering for groups of Vietnamese who wish to meet and linger over a traditional Vietnamese breakfast or a snack.

Vietnamese residents of Canberra frequently told me in glowing terms about Cabramatta. Many travel interstate to participate in the vibrant street life and delicious food. By and large the Canberra Vietnamese community lacks a comparable focus; there is no similar spatially localized, and economically self-serving centre fostering ethnic interdependence. Canberra is a city of modern administration containing the headquarters of the Departments of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs and Foreign Affairs. These offices are of considerable importance to many Vietnamese, a few of whom have chosen to live in Canberra for this very reason. By being close to where decisions are made they hope to be better able to facilitate cases in which they have a personal interest. Canberra is also the site of the Embassy of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, a thorn in the side for many and a constant reminder of why they are in Australia.

**Conclusion**

In sum, the Vietnamese located in Canberra are part of a larger, world-wide migration of Vietnamese that has taken place since 1975. Those now in Canberra comprise a community of compatriots who agree upon and morally support each other in upholding considered critical values and beliefs established, in large measure, prior to arrival. Indeed it needs to be keep in mind that time spent in Australia is for most Vietnamese migrants no more than a brief interlude. The years spent in Vietnam shaped their lives and some claim they would return, if this were at all possible. They continue to be tied to their country of birth through letters, parcels and money sent to family members who remain behind. Overseas visits and telephone calls keep them in contact with relatives in other

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4 This soup is taken as breakfast from roadside stalls in Vietnam, or as a snack later in the day. It is based on a beef, or in the South a fish broth which requires long hours of simmering. Just prior to serving noodles are added, the customer then garnishes with fresh herbs - spring onion, mint, coriander - and a few drops of *nuoc mam*. Given the time needed for preparation this soup lends itself to commercial production.
Western countries, while ethnic newspaper and radio broadcasts ensure they are abreast of recent political events occurring in Vietnam.

An historical dimension is needed to contextualise these Vietnamese actions, thoughts and feelings, as well as other family values and economic concerns which preceded and precipitated their departure from South Vietnam. These are addressed in Chapter 1.
Chapter 1. Post-Independence Vietnamese Society

In this chapter I use restauranteurs' personal narratives and ethnographic material from the post French period to develop certain themes about Vietnamese family life and the increasing polarization of Vietnamese urban society during the 1960's and 1970's. Narrative, of course, may reflect an idealized view of the past, especially if life subsequently has been difficult [Clifford 1983:131,139]. Nevertheless it tells something of where these families once stood in South Vietnamese society and what was important to them on the eve of their departure. I argue that social position in Vietnam had a lot to do with why these families left and has consequently influenced the hopes they hold for life in Australia. Pre-existing beliefs, habits and ways of organization have been transported and re-applied in achieving in the ACT aspirations which in part take meaning from the past.

Even so, it is important to bear in mind that informants came from an internally divided and conflict-ridden society. Deteriorating social and economic conditions in the 1960's and 1970's exacerbated longstanding regional and religious tensions, and magnified differences between families in terms of wealth. These historical tensions still hold sway and appear to have played a part in shaping the restauranteurs' sense of Vietnamese ethnic identity in the Canberra context.

Pre-Independence Southern Society.

When the French arrived in Vietnam toward the middle of the nineteenth century they found a predominately agrarian society ruled by an Emperor and stratified according to wealth in land. Social and political eminence belonged to the mandarinate, the intellectual elite which made up the civil service [Keyes C.F. 1977]. However the hold of the Hue-based bureaucracy was somewhat tenuous over the more distant and recently settled South [Schönberg 1979:24]. Nam Tien, the southward migration which, over many centuries, brought the Vietnamese to the area known today as South Vietnam, is a recurring theme in Vietnamese history [see Cotter 1968]. During the colonial era the Camau Peninsula [See Appendix Tran and Bich] and Transbassac region of Cochin China were still largely unsettled. The latter remained a wild region where life was precarious because of flooding and Cambodian pressure well into this century [Rambo 1973:215]. The
Nam Tien left its mark on Southern society; patrilineages were shallower and Southerners reputedly less tradition bound and less attached to their natal villages than their Northern, or Central, counterparts [Rambo 1973-13; Scott 1976-40.68; Donoghue 1982-Introduction]. The pioneering heritage persists today in firmly held regional attitudes detailed below.

Colonization saw the Emperor replaced by a new and largely foreign ruling class. A Vietnamese landed gentry arose out of the French practice of parcelling out vast tracts of land to themselves and select Vietnamese. This extremely small but wealthy Vietnamese elite, often French speaking and French educated, derived their income from the countryside, but their perspectives were completely urban [Brocheaux microfilm 203]. Many were absentee landlords, renting their land to tenant farmers. Thus historically, privately owned and freely alienable land in Cochin China was skewed in favour of a few. Sale for profit was a well-known and accepted endeavour. Commercialization of rice, rubber, tea, coffee, sugar and coconut plantation agriculture expanded the number of agricultural wage labourers. McAlister [1970-71] estimates landless groups - tenant farmer and agricultural wage labourers - comprised over half the rural population in South Vietnam in the 1930's.

During the French period a middle class comprising about 10% of the regional population also emerged. This section of society was located in Saigon-Cholon and the dozen or so regional towns where the French presence created a demand for clerks, cashiers, minor officials and other white-collar workers [McAlister 1970-73]. Their recompense was well above that received by manual workers. Prior to the arrival of the French, trade also centred in these towns, was dominated by the Chinese. Chinese settlements had existed in the Mekong Delta - at Bien Hoa and

1 Although Northerners are poorly represented among Canberra restauranteurs (one spouse had been born in the North and brought South by her parents in 1954), they are nevertheless an important "other" against whom Southern informants evaluate and know themselves. See in particular page 66.

2 Cochin China was not only characterised by sharp internal class divisions during this period but also suffered from a weak communal tradition. Almost 25% of cultivated land in the Northern Red River Province was designated as communal land (cong dien) in 1931 [Rambo 1973-30]. In contrast only 2.5% of land in Cochin China had been earmarked for the same purpose by 1940 [Rambo 1973-42]. Independence did little to change this; Hendry [1960(a)-27] puts the figure at around 3% in the late 1950's, the years of government agrarian reform. Holdings also continued to be concentrated in a few hands [McAlister 1970-70]. In 1964 around half the cultivated land in the Mekong Delta was held by persons owning in excess of 123.5 acres [Smith 1967-319]. The average plot size was as much as 24.7 in the West and never fell below 2.5 acres in even the oldest Southern province [ibid]. Conversely the majority of holdings in the long settled and more densely populated Central Lowlands ranged from 2 to 5 acres, and here 75% of farmers owned their land [Smith 1967-326].

3 These, established by Ming soldiers defeated at home by Manchu forces, formed the nucleus for subsequent Vietnamese movement into the area. In 1778 many of the original Chinese moved to present day Cholon to avoid further repercussions of the Tay Son revolt.
My Tho - from as early as 1679 [Tate 1979-342]. The colonial takeover led to a dramatic increase in Chinese numbers and economic prominence [Smith 1967-98].

Independence and the American Impact on Vietnamese Society

With the end of French rule Vietnam’s economy bore all the marks of colonial domination and economic neglect. There was an almost total reliance on agricultural production, and the South in particular suffered from a poorly developed industrial sector. Independence in 1954 brought partition and close on a million refugees, the majority of whom were Roman Catholics from the North. Yet energy directed towards refugee settlement and rebuilding the war ravaged country was soon dissipated by the increase in insurgency activity. From 1960 onwards geographical mobility reached unprecedented levels. Saigon grew from a quiet urban centre of just under one million to three times this size. The populations of the major provincial towns in the Mekong Delta also multiplied several times as rural dwellers sought refuge from the insecurity of the countryside. Barton [1981-104] estimates 60% of the South’s people resided in urban areas at the height of the war, obviously a major dislocation for a population previously 90% rural.

The American build-up after 1961 exacerbated tensions already evident in South Vietnamese society, in particular the developing economic gulf between country and city life. Rural areas experienced the worst of the fighting and only 20% of goods entering South Vietnam under the commercial import programme, the major American aid project fund, found their way to the countryside [Scigliano 1964-121]. The remainder stayed in the cities where a new suburban minority profited from the war. Middlemen and traders did well while the economy was fueled by importation and consumption largely financed from outside, and small lower-middle class entrepreneurs with businesses in close proximity to American bases also did a thriving trade. Meanwhile farmers lost ground economically as military activity hampered both the cultivation and transportation of crops.

The American presence aggravated disparities of wealth between urban dwellers as well. People wanted to work for the Americans because of the high wages they paid [Hoskins and Shepherd 1970-309; Hawthorne 1982-73], or in the internationally financed development projects such as the WHO’s Malaria Eradication Programme [see Appendix Hung and Thu]. These salaries made the Republican civil service pay seem paltry indeed. It is estimated the Americans injected a million dollars a day into construction projects during 1965 [Smith 1967-309]. Lucrative contracts to supply the Americans with raw materials and labour, soaring rents for housing and office space, and retailing hitherto unknown manufactured goods brought high incomes and rapid wealth to a fortunate few.
However the country was living beyond its means throughout the 1960’s and 1970’s. At no time did government revenue anywhere near meet expenditure. By the mid-sixties many urban middle and lower income Vietnamese families were in financial difficulty. Civil service wages did not keep pace with spiralling inflation, and those on fixed incomes could not meet basic commodity price hikes [Hess 1979-123; Hinh Nguyen Duy 1984-114]. In 1965 alone the cost of living in Saigon rose by 58% [Smith 1967-310; see Hess 1979-120 for 1967 to 1974 figures]. Obviously these inflationary pressures and urbanization had an impact on Vietnamese families.

The Family.

The Vietnamese family is encompassed in the concepts of Ho and nha [Hendry 1964; Hickey 1964; Donoghue 1982]. The Ho, or patrilineage is a local entity whose members live within extended family units. Ideally it is also a land owning group capable of supporting a cult of the ancestors, whose guardian in principle is the most senior living male, but could be, in the South at least, a head nominated on the basis of respect [Hickey 1964-82]. The Gia Long Code4 of 1812 which propagated this structure was taken over by the Emperor almost unchanged from the Chinese prototype, but has rarely been realized in the more recently settled South. The Ho as a corporate structure had not been personally experienced by any Vietnamese participating in this study. I found the nearest approximations to any larger sized social group to be closely knit neighbourhood of relatives [see Appendix Tien], and a village community where a large number of inhabitants claimed descent from a common but unspecified ancestor [see Appendix Tran]. But even in these instances it is within the household, or nha, that decisions were made and activities centred. The term needs some clarification. Nha refers both to the domestic unit and the home shared in common. There is an affective dimension, of “hearth and home” qualities, to the second meaning. This was the domestic structure common to educated city dwellers during the sixties [Smith 1967-108], and in which all bar one couple5 resided prior to leaving Vietnam. Typically the nha corresponded exactly, or very closely6, to the nuclear family.

4The Emperor Gia Long reunited Vietnam at the beginning of the nineteenth century and installed the Nguyen dynasty which lasted until the abdication of Bao Dai at the end of World War II [Keyes C.F. 1977-186; Smith 1967-40].

5The exception [see Appendix - Mai and Cao] married after the communist takeover and were compelled to live in dormitories at their place of work.

6In these households there was often not more than one extra member who was usually a parent of the husband or wife, or one of his/her siblings.
The *Ho* held meaning for research participants simply in terms of a patrilineal emphasis, concerned with perpetuation of the *Ho* name and meeting moral and behavioral prescriptions towards more distantly related kin. Kin have what Fortes [1969-238] refers to as "irresistible claims on one another's support and consideration in contradistinction to non-kin, simply by reason of fact that they were kin". As the narratives in the Appendix [see Phao, Kim and Hung] relate, when accommodation or employment was required it was invariably a relative who provided them. Some form of accounting, often in the form of money, passed between the givers and receivers of assistance in the majority of instances cited. Even today despite the economic strain of re-settling in a foreign land, requests are received for money, clothes and medicine from relatives in Vietnam. And it is to the extended family that many Vietnamese turn to expedite entry to Australia and for post-arrival help in establishing themselves. This is not to say that these requests are not at times resented, nor met with a few begrudging comments about misconceived ideas of wealth and ease of life in the West. Such reactions can not be attributed merely to current difficulties. Ethnographies which describe life in Vietnam abound with instances where help given outside the nuclear family was considered a "loathsome duty" [Hoskins and Shepherd 1970-165]. Family ties were not felt so deeply that "the desire to obtain a return on goods or money loaned within the extended family" was passed up [Hendry J 1964-222].

The *Ho*’s hierarchical basis is made explicit through the use of modifiers indicating inequalities of age and sex. The masculine orientation is evidenced in the Confucian maxim to females: "obey your Father when at home, obey your husband after marriage, and obey your son after your husband’s death" [See Phung Thi Hanh 1979-78]. Similarly a clear linguistic distinction is made between patrilineal, or "inside" kin (*noi*), and nonpatrilineal, or "outside" kin (*ngoai*). Individual, or personal, harmony is achieved through meeting the obligations of respect towards one’s elders, considered the treasure trove of family law and wisdom, and filial piety towards one’s parents. *Ho* membership includes both the living and the dead, linked through the observation of ancestor worship practices. Ancestor worship is in this sense integrative, it ties *Ho* and *nha* members together by way of meeting obligations to a common ancestor.

Yet how pervasive was ancestor worship in South Vietnam after independence? The ethnographic literature indicates that both in the countryside and the cities, the vast majority of families maintained a family altar at home, and

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7Further the transposition of kin terminology to wider social usage indicates the Vietnamese conception of society as an extension of the family [Te 1974].
commemorated the deaths of various ancestors despite professing to be Buddhist, Christian or whatever [Hoskins and Shepherd 1970-64; Donoghue 1982-58]. Certainly the families participating in this study are no exception to these trends. All practised ancestor worship in Vietnam, and espouse in conjunction with it a code of morality the roots of which lie originally in Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism. All have continued these practices and beliefs in Australia. This is equally true for Thu who was raised as a Roman Catholic, as it is for Tran and Bich who joined the Baptist Church while on Bidong Island [see Appendix Thu, and Tran and Bich].

However not only was the structural ideal of the Ho uncommon in South Vietnam, but its patrilineal emphasis was contravened by tendencies toward bilaterality in practice. For example, both males and females could inherit [Hickey 1964-42; Smith 1967-106] and the husband’s ancestors did not monopolize the household’s altar. The wife’s ancestors were - and continue to be - represented and the anniversary of their deaths observed, although fewer people may be invited to a less elaborate feast [see Appendix Tran and Bich]. Similarly while the male-oriented kinship model specifies newly-weds should live with the groom’s parents when a new nha was not established immediately after a wedding, in practice it was commonly the bride’s. This decision seems to have been a pragmatic one, made on the basis of such considerations as wealth and employment opportunities. While flexibility obviously existed within the patrilocal focus couples also strove to establish their own households and businesses. As one informant pronounced adamantly, ultimately “we want separate kitchens and separate businesses”.

Indeed Vietnam’s political and economic circumstances during the 1960’s and 1970’s did little to support the notion of the extended family living under the same roof, or even in the same locality. Hickey [1964-279] describes the “turning inwards” of villagers preoccupied with self and immediate family as insecurity plagued the rural areas. Migration further contributed to dismantling the extended family. Geographic distance weakened the authority of senior males and lineage solidarity, demonstrated by gathering together on the anniversary of an ancestor’s death, became harder to achieve. Phao [see Appendix Phao] believes the unparalleled mobility in Vietnam during the 1960’s posed the single greatest threat to “the Vietnamese family” because of the ensuing attenuation of familial ties. Should members fail to attend an anniversary celebration, or begin to mark it elsewhere, the Ho would in all probability fission. Subsequent migration overseas has continued and strengthened these pressures. Phao (whose sentiments are echoed by other informants) describes anniversary celebrations as being smaller in Australia because “family members are far-away, and friends too busy”. “There is no time here, cooking is kept simple where it was really big (lavish) in Vietnam”.

Vietnam's economic instability and the inflation which made it more and more difficult for many households to make ends meet also eroded Ho solidarity. The middle class ideal of husband as major breadwinner became increasingly difficult to emulate [Hawthorne 1982-60, 67 and 69]. In contrast nha exclusiveness was enhanced by the need to depend on wages brought in by wives and grown-up daughters [Hess 1979-126]. Hess [1979-236] notes the intense pressure exerted on the sons of urban, middle class families to perform well in examinations, find a job, help support their hard pressed families and also avoid conscription. And in the process of re-establishing themselves in Australia demands are made on all available familial earning power, irrespective sex or age (see Chapter 4).

Preoccupation with the well-being of immediate kin inadvertently strengthened the nha vis-a-vis the Ho as nha members became more closely integrated during Vietnam's period of economic and political turmoil. Indeed the nha's mode of operation, described more fully in Chapter 4, effectively contravenes the supremacy of the male oriented-kinship model. Within the nha the emphasis is on the unity of opposite sex partners (who refer to each other as minh meaning we / us /ours) working together to provide for themselves and their particular off-spring. The domestic group's solidarity is evidenced in the nha budget to which all members past the age of childhood dependency were/are expected to contribute. In Vietnam budget management was often left in the wife's hands, making saving and investment choices not solely male prerogatives [see Appendix Tran, and Phao]. Even major decisions, such as fleeing the country, were reportedly made jointly.

Nevertheless tension between Ho identification and nha exclusiveness and self-interest (evident in the irksome nature and calculation of financial cost involved in providing help to more distant kin) remained. Advantage to be had from maintaining extended family ties, alluded to in the proverbial wisdom "Give the surplus to the Ho and rely on Ho (sic) when in need" [Hy Van Luong 1984-299] is contradicted by the popular Saigonese saying "The light only shines in one's own home" [Hess 1979-291]. The latter, I suggest, reflects the alienation and atomization experienced by urban families and the antagonism between rich and poor relatives described by Hoskins and Shepherd [1970-150] in post-independence Southern society.

The Family Business.

Barton [1981-132] distinguishes three tiers in the Republican economy, based on the technological requirements necessary for participation in each. The most sophisticated, the import/export sector, need not concern us here as none of the families participating in this study made their living from external trade.
The “intermediate sector” encompassed the larger processing firms and retailers, as well as auxiliary services such as financiers and transporters, located in the provincial centres in conjunction with Saigon-Cholon, the pivot of the South’s commercial trade. Participation in this sector required larger amounts of capital than most individuals could hope to raise independently, and therefore necessitated finding outside sources of credit. In addition, labour requirements were usually more hands than families could provide from within, and the entrepreneur’s work entailed a full time commitment.

Barton [1981-144] estimates that by the late 1960’s and early 1970’s 60% to 70% of the commercial activity in the intermediate sector was in Chinese hands. Claims to Chinese identity required the ability to speak a Chinese dialect, trace a genealogical link to China and, as a member of various formal Chinese organizations, maintain a network of interpersonal relations facilitating business transactions carried out according to a shared moral code [see Barton 1981-366]. Thu’s father is a case in point.

Phat grew up in Ben Tre Province some two hundred kilometres south of Saigon. When Phat was eighteen he went to the capital to work as an accountant in an uncle’s business. While in the city he met his wife-to-be and subsequently moved to Bien Hoa where her family resided. In Bien Hoa Phat went into partnership with his wife’s brother. Together they invested in a brick factory. However as soon as he was financially able Phat struck out on his own. His action reflected the wisdom of separating “while the feeling was still good”. It was not precipitated by any disagreement or animosity. Phat set about starting another brick factory, this time employing between sixty and seventy people. Phat used a Chinese dialect “to do business” and claimed Chinese descent, although Thu is unable to trace the migrating relative. However Phat never mastered Chinese calligraphy and made no effort to instruct his children in Chinese.

Phat’s wife began a “mini Paul’s Home Improvement centre”, as Thu likened it. This business sold “everything needed to build a house” - cement, nails, timber and paint - and occupied the ground floor of the family’s two storey brick house. Neither parent held investments in the form of land. They did however spend lavishly on the children’s education. Thu, the eldest, attended the local primary school and then a private Catholic secondary school where French was taught as the second language. However her five younger siblings went to private boarding schools in Saigon where all instruction was in French. Her brothers went on to university in France. Thu was expected to stay at home rather than seek full-time employment on completing her schooling. She helped her mother with the shop’s paperwork, and enrolled in French cooking lessons. She married Hung, who worked for the Malaria Eradication Programme, in 1969. Her parents gave the couple a brick and tile “storey” house as a wedding present, located just 500metres from their own residence.

This family’s wealth and access to elitist education puts them among the urban
upper class found in South Vietnam in the 1960's [Smith 1967-99]. Phat publicly maintained Chinese identity despite being born and living all his life in Vietnam, considering Vietnam "home" and using Vietnamese as the language of choice within the nha. Commercial activity in the upper levels of the economy reportedly went hand in hand with the maintenance of Chinese identity [Barton 1981]. But as Brocheaux (microfilm-158) quite rightly asks "how many Vietnamese of the West could not discover a Chinese ancestor?", as prior to the 1930's Chinese migrants frequently took Vietnamese women as wives and mistresses.

The peasant trading sector was Vietnamese dominated, at least publicly so, for even here many could claim Chinese ancestry had it been convenient [Barton 1981-145]. This third tier of the economy contained the small family businesses - the tailor shops, barbers, garages, bicycle repair shops and general stores which feature so predominantly in the narratives - intended only to provide a livelihood for nha members. Tran and Bich's family store is a case in point.

Tran and Bich, now in their mid forties, originated from families of similar social circumstance living on the Camau Peninsula. This region, located at the furthermost point of South Vietnam, is known as "the sponge" for land and water merge. Both Tran's and Bich's natal families depended on fishing and agriculture for their livelihood. Tran's family was particularly well off. His father owned an off-shore fishing boat which was manned with hired labour. When he turned fifteen Tran joined his father aboard. The family also held fifty acres of land, planted with banana and coconut palms and sugar cane. Tran's mother ran a shop from the house. She was an astute business woman and additional investments in land were left to her.

After Tran and Bich were married they lived with Tran's parents for ten years. Tran indicated this was an unusually long time. But while he was away working as a government official in the provincial capital, the family was safer in the village close to the ancestors. The couple moved to a home of their own when Tran returned to the village permanently in 1965. They were assisted financially to set up a store in the front rooms by Tran's parents. They sold everything from soap, biscuits, sweets, matches, soft drinks to pharmaceuticals and rice. Stocks were brought in by boat from Camau, the provincial capital, and Namcan a large town in the vicinity. The shop was attended by Bich and the children while Tran used it as a base from which to practice as a health worker. The sick came for western style drugs and injections, and advice on herbal remedies suitable for ailments such as stomach disorders, eye infections, headaches and fevers. The family was by their own account "very rich between 1965 and 1970".

This account illustrates many features typical of family enterprises in Vietnam. The line dividing business and home was rarely absolute. The work place was usually located in front or behind the living quarters, and people moved frequently and easily from one setting to the other. Businesses were financed by individual
saving or family loans, making the economic standing of one's relations crucial in determining the steps to take to secure economic independence. Further, Vietnamese involved in this economic sector generally lacked confidence in partnerships, and consequently businesses were unable to expand beyond a certain point [see Appendix Tran, and Hung]. Decision making and responsibility remained in the owner/manager (and spouse's) hands as entrepreneurs generally preferred to start another small concern rather than expand beyond what they could supervise personally. At the same time a strong preference existed for employing family members, or at least finding them apprentice positions - often unpaid - with extended kin. Attitudes of filial piety and Ho solidarity attached to the workplace.

The desire to preserve nha independence while also meeting obligations inherent to Ho membership explain, to some extent, the proliferation of small, nha based enterprises in South Vietnam. Small businesses utilized excess family labour without jeopardizing nha exclusiveness. In addition horizontal integration, which capitalized on extended kin ties, helped to control competition and the unstable market forces which plagued traders at all economic levels in the 1960's and 1970's [Barton 1981-125]. Instance Phao and Tien's entry into the restaurant business.

Phao was born in 1941 in a village three hundred kilometres south of Danang, on the Central Vietnamese coast. He describes growing up in "a real peasant family" whose house was constructed of "bamboo, wood and thatch". The domestic group comprised his parents, two brothers and his father's brother. All except the uncle helped work the 2.5 acre plot Phao's father had inherited. The uncle had a job fixing carts and bicycles in the nearby village. This man sparked Phao's interest in mechanics. Phao went south in his early teens in order to study "things mechanical" at a technical college outside Saigon. His father arranged, and paid, for him to stay with a relative as the local village did not offer such educational opportunities.

After graduating Phao drove a truck carrying bricks to building sites. While "on a job" he met Tien at her father's garage in Bien Hoa. Tien had left school after completing the primary grades and taken an apprentice position in her father's sister's restaurant. Tien's uncle stayed "out front" and took care of official dealings, while his wife made most of the basic management and financial decisions. Casuals - usually relatives or neighbours - were brought in on an hourly basis to prepare vegetables and clean up.

Tien's apprenticeship ceased when she married Phao and moved to a village mid-way between Bien Hoa and Saigon. Phao continued in the transport industry until the the Bien Hoa/Saigon highway opened in 1961

8The Central Lowlands have been settled by the Vietnamese for well on 700 years. Villages here (like those in the North) are characterized by dense populations, small landholdings, bounded extremities and well developed lineages [see Donoughue 1982].
after which Tien's aunt and uncle found business at the restaurant quickened. Unable to meet the increased demand, Phao and Tien were approached with the suggestion that they fill the gap. Once they agreed, the aunt and uncle advised and assisted the young couple to set up a business styled on their own and catering to the same clientele. The new restaurant was situated right on the Dong Nai river, a location reputed for its scenic charm and popular with soldiers and day trippers from Saigon.

In the years that followed Phao brought his family south. He arranged a job in transport for one brother and paid for another's continuing education in Saigon. Once his parents were settled in Bien Hoa, Phao and Tien left the restaurant in their hands and went to Saigon. Here Phao secured a contract to supply the Americans with sand, gravel and stone needed to build air bases. The family was by this stage well off. There was no need for Tien to work. Phao boasts his wife could have worked if she had wished, but it would have been demeaning if she had had to. They owned a car and were able to frequent the resorts at Vung Tau and Dalat on weekends.

Here Tien's uncle encouraged a trusted relative to set up in the same line of business rather than leave the economic opportunity vacant for a stranger. Phao described the venture as one where "we co-operated, we did not compete".

Vertical integration achieved many of the same ends, for example Tien's father not only ran the local garage but also the spare parts shop next door [see Appendix Tien]. These business practices did not necessarily guarantee an increased income, but did minimize risk in the uncertain market. They ensured the provision of supplies and offered protection from price undercutting in a market where Vietnamese guilds or co-operatives did not exist, and law enforcement agencies could not be relied upon to enforce contracts.

The peasant trading sector also included a myriad of petty traders, having much in common with the Javanese vendor economy described by Alice Dewey [1962], and with Clifford Geertz's [1963(b)] "bazaar economy". Activity centred on the local market place where surplus local produce and simple manufactured goods were exchanged and services offered. Little capital or knowledge beyond local market conditions were required to participate, and traders usually worked alone on a part time basis. Many women - such as Hung's mother - bought raw ingredients necessary for rice cakes or snacks, added their labour by cooking at home, and sold the finished product on the surrounding streets [see Appendix Hung]. It was to this sector that the marginalized, hampered by a lack of capital and without many alternative uses for their time or knowledge, turned to make a little extra cash. Peddling and processing provided one of the few outlets for their initiative. Another - embraced by Kim - was to find employment as an urban wage labourer.
Kim grew up in My Tho, a large town in the Mekong Delta. Her father, a petty government official, died when she was eight. During his illness Kim’s father ran through his meagre savings, leaving the family impoverished. Kim’s mother then worked as a petty vendor, buying in bulk from the local market and returning to the neighbourhood to hawk the goods. Kim left school when she was eleven, and subsequently moped about the house with little to do. She occasionally found work making and carrying bricks for the local brick works, and was paid “by the hundred”. When she reached her mid-teens Kim went to Saigon to live with her mother’s sister who secured her a position as a domestic help and child minder with a prestigious Vietnamese family. Kim’s employers brought Kim on a posting to Australia. She has never returned to Vietnam.

Selling one’s unskilled labour by the day to the local brick factory was a hazardous way of life, as more often than not work was unavailable. While there may be little difference in income between the small-time trader and the earnings of individuals like Kim (selling the only thing she had, her unskilled labour), there is a world of difference in terms of the independence to engage in economic activity where and when one wishes. The dislike of becoming a non-familial, wage labourer persists today [see Chapter 4].

**The New Intellectual Elite**

Distinctions based on participation in various sectors of the Republican economy were paralleled by rankings made on the grounds of educational attainment. The French began the process whereby the learning of the Confucian elite, desired as something of value in itself, was undermined and replaced by a western oriented education preparing Vietnamese youth for the lower echelons of the colonial bureaucracy [Keyes C.F 1977]. The rich (such as Thu’s parents) sought schools with an all French curriculum and tuition in the French language. The baccalauréat, taken at the end of secondary school, represented the attainment of “intellectual” status, while a western degree, especially one from Paris, was “the crown of social success” [Hinh Nguyen Duy 1984-14].

The “new education” offering “milk in the morning and champagne in the evening” [Thich Nhat Hanh 1967-13] was the mainstay of a small, largely city-based, middle class of bureaucrats, salary-earners and self-employed professionals. Members did not employ labour but neither did they work with their hands. Their education assured a rise in social standing from manual (tho) to non-manual
(thay) labour⁹, the latter considered infinitely superior to the former. After independence the civil service, which had always being popular with middle class and upwardly mobile Vietnamese, expanded [Scigliano 1964-48]. The family profiles I collected told regularly of jobs as officials in provincial towns, or as doctors or teachers in government employ. At the same time other paths to enrichment were not belittled. Hickey [1964-173] and Hendry [1964-127,257] report on the absence of disdain expressed towards trading. Certainly in terms of economic clout and social position merchants prevailed over farmers during this era. Another strata, that of soldier, emerged at the bottom, filled by the sons of poor peasants lacking the wherewithal to escape conscription.

**Social Mobility.**

Social mobility was therefore possible in South Vietnamese society. Literacy was considered essential to any rise in station [Hickey 1964-273; Hendry 1964-31]. However availing oneself of educational opportunities was out of the reach of many. In Republican Vietnam secondary education was largely in private hands. In 1966 only 10% of children of secondary school age attended, the bulk of whom were children of the propertied and/or educated [Smith 1967-143, 152f]. As a member of the urban lower class Kim was correct when she recognised that, with little education or money, Vietnam offered her a bleak future [see Appendix Kim]. However while Kim was raised in an impoverished female-headed household, most of the participants in this research were more fortunate. All received at least a primary school education, and often much more. Phao, Hung, Tran, Mai, Cao and others whose lives are not documented in the Appendix were all aided by parents and elder siblings to attend secondary school and tertiary institutions, moving as necessary to the larger cities where the best educational facilities were to be found.

In Chapter 5 I describe the proprietors’ hopes that their children will make the most of the educational opportunities in Australia. Although widely espoused by the Vietnamese encountered during fieldwork, this attitude is not reported across the board in ethnographies written about everyday life in South Vietnam. For instance, Hendry [1964-281] notes significant differences between rural dwellers in terms of aspirations for their offspring. Where the well-to-do held definite plans,

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⁹Beyond this dichotomy it is hard to tell just how influential the Confucian hierarchy of occupations had ever been in the South. The hierarchy orders occupations as follows: first the scholar, second the farmer, third the artisan and forth the trader. Woodside [1971-30] indicates a somewhat pragmatic approach taken by some sections of society to an indigenous model which fitted South Vietnam even less well than it did its native China. And Hawthorne [1982-77] quotes a Vietnamese refugee now in Australia as saying “although the Vietnamese sometimes say that the farmers are the second highest class, the truth is we have usually considered the peasants as a bunch of stupid, illiterate yokels”. Whatever the Confucian hierarchy’s accuracy the educated retained pre-eminent rank in Republican society as the “new creed” of career advancement took hold [Hinh Nguyen Duy 1984-155].
the poorer’s thoughts on the matter were vague. They held no specific ambitions for their children and had thought little about making a better life for themselves. Similarly the majority of Saigon factory workers had few plans for the future, or ideas about how to improve their lot [Hendry 1960]. Theirs was predominately an attitude of “fatalistic acceptance of what is, tinged with the fleeting hopes that it may be somewhat better” [1960-149]. Pupil absenteeism was rife in the schools of the Xom Chua Van Tho district of Saigon studied by Hoskins and Shepherd [1970-41]. Parental attitudes to education demonstrated in this predominately refugee neighbourhood can at best be described as lackadasical.

All of this is in marked contrast to the behaviour of the Vietnamese who participated in this research. Their aspirations and attitudes are consistent with those of the more prosperous, for whom upward social mobility was a recognised possibility in South Vietnam. Kim, reminiscing on the lives led by herself and her sisters, says “some build a good life; some build a hard one”. She views her rise to proprietorial standing as reward for her efforts, and blames her sisters for their continuing poverty. Her sentiment echoes Southern thinking that “nobody is rich for three generations or poor for three generations” [Te 1974-124; Thanh Hoang Ngoc 1982-38]. Scott [1976-185] encapsulates a distinction between the Northern and Southern perspective in two questions which reflect this. He writes that Northerners will ask “is the elite doing its duty”, reflecting belief in the immutability of the social hierarchy and value placed on knowing one’s place in the world. In contrast Southerners wonder “what are my chances of making it into the elite”. These regional attitudes, which in part reflect historical differences in the development of Vietnam, persist in Australia. While discussing the Southern predilection to “go it alone” and individualism generally, a Northerner, now living in Cabramatta, quipped that it was due to their background: “vagrants who don’t care for form”.

Status Markers.

Douglas [1979] makes the point that physical consumption is but one of the services yielded by goods. Goods also make visible statements about people’s differential status and social exclusion, and in the Vietnamese case indicate the extent to which they are imbued with a deep sense of class consciousness.

For Southerners with money to invest during the 1960’s, land\textsuperscript{10} and real estate

\textsuperscript{10}Over the years there have been a series of restrictions on Chinese owning land in South Vietnam, although in practice many of these were circumnavigated [Rambo 1973-136]. The Chinese have also had little or no access to the civil service, and in 1956 eleven occupations were closed to foreigners. These included rice milling, grocers, and petrol outlets, all hitherto dominated by Chinese [Scigliano 1964-5].
were the preferred choices. These provided financial security and socially respected proof of success. Understandably some areas of commerce were considered unattractive due to Chinese competition and the readily acknowledged lack of trust and co-operative spirit between Vietnamese entrepreneurs [Barton 1981-148]. Gold was a more liquid form of saving. It was used wherever possible as a hedge against inflation, while cash was directed into conspicuous spending [Rambo 1973-117]. Houses were a "primary prestige symbol" [Hickey 1964-273]. Vietnamese categorized each other in terms of house types. Phao came from a "real peasant house" made from bamboo and thatch, while Thu and others lived in prestigious brick and tile dwellings.11 Familial wealth was displayed in the size and sumptuousness of feasts - prepared for the rich by caterers - marking a wedding or the anniversary of an ancestor's death. Car ownership, orchards tended12, education received and schools attended all speak volumes about the social categories these families belonged to, and the corresponding ideas and beliefs to which they ascribed.

Confucian sanctions towards moderation and unseemly display of material wealth had never been firmly established in the pioneering South [Rambo 1973-45]. Northerners disapprove of perceived Southern eagerness for wealth and disregard of austere Confucian virtues. Prestige goods had always been available to any Southerner who could pay; they were not tied to rank or office as had been the case in the mandarinate of the Vietnamese Empire [1973-357]. The Republican era saw acquired wealth become an important yardstick of a family's worth and, in conjunction with political "know-how", one means of joining the Southern elite. People relied on highly personalized relationships to win appointment and share in the spoils of employment and office [Scigliano 1964-76]. More generally Vietnamese in the 100 million piastre bracket are said to have only associated with others of the same kind [Barton 1981-209]. Educated Saigonese were reportedly unwilling to work side by side with poorer, less educated people on community projects [Hoskings and Shepherd 1970-88]. In this increasingly materialistic and factionalized society, many Vietnamese believed their own family, clique or religious sub-group was the only one to trust [Hinh Nguyen Duy 1984-78].

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11 Historically two-storey brick and tile houses were associated with the Chinese but later became the common style of house construction for the well-to-do in urban areas.

12 Hendry notes [1964-92,99] fruit cultivation is an activity associated with the upper and middle classes.
Conclusion.

By and large the participants in this study belonged to the South Vietnamese urban middle class; all but Tran and Bich lived in, or near, the larger provincial towns of the Mekong. They derived from families well-off in terms of economic and symbolic wealth [Bourdieu 1977-178]. The majority owned some land and/or business in Vietnam and were able to avail themselves of education, the latter being one avenue to prestigious office and financial reward. They also had access to, and ranked each other by, material goods considered "rare and worthy of being sought after" [ibid]. Some reportedly had never had it so good. In sum, participants comprised part of that section of Vietnamese society which was the major beneficiary of the American presence and dollar [Scigliano 1964-126]. They left Vietnam because they foresaw no future for themselves or their children under the communists, and therefore could only anticipate an insecure old age and status after death awaiting them. The communists "turned our world upside down" they say, and undermined familial relations by encouraging spying and public accusation of parents by children [Phung Thi Hanh 1979-81; Hawthorne 1982-164 and 201]. Flight is interpreted and given prominence today as "a sacrifice" undertaken by the present generation to safeguard the future of the next; an act of courage founded on the belief that material wealth and social position can be rebuilt.

These families have brought with them, and maintain in Australia, a distinctive kin ideology which entails primary loyalty to the nha and family name taken to be a collective product. They also continue the cycle of advances and restitution between the generations which secures the ongoing provision of willing workers for the family enterprise. This chapter has pointed to some features of the cycle. Vietnamese children owe their parents obedience, educational success, heirs and care after death. In turn parents are expected to provide their offspring with moral training, material support and where possible assist them in establishing careers or businesses. The respective duties and obligations of parents and children within the "traditional" framework of the nha articulate Vietnamese ethnic identity in Australia. They are core elements of the Vietnamese ethnic identity constructed by Vietnamese in Canberra and detailed in the following chapters. Thus as the provider of labour and perpetrator of shared Vietnamese knowledge and beliefs the nha links particularistic family interest and the development of the ethnic community.
Chapter 2. The Politicization Of Ethnicity

In this chapter I argue that Vietnamese ethnic identity is a social construct, a product of human activity available to its various producers and to other members of Australian society as an element in a deceptively "self-evident" world [Berger and Luckman 1966-33]. I explain how Vietnamese ethnic identity reflects, in part, the dialectic which existed between the sending and receiving countries at particular historical moments. For present purposes I wish to consider how and when the Vietnamese entered Australia, and more particularly the impact these events had on developing Australian typifications of Vietnamese as "ethnics" and "refugees". Both have implications for the acceptance and future place of Vietnamese in Canberra and, more generally, in Australian society.

I shall argue that the dominant Australian culture's image of a culturally, physically and demographically uniform collection of individuals sharing homogeneous traits bears limited relation to Vietnamese self perceptions. This is hardly surprising. "Knowledge" is, as Berger and Luckman [1966-43] quite rightly point out, "socially distributed, possessed differently by different individuals and types of individuals". However what is important is that this knowledge is contested in multicultural Australia, and further the Anglo-Celtic majority has the means to impose its particular version of reality.

My purpose in the latter part of this chapter is to begin drawing out and explicating the meaning of ethnic identity for the Vietnamese themselves through discussion of two key markers of Vietnamese identity; namely flag and family. I employ flag and family as shorthand terms to refer to the social institutions and cultural formations which surround and impart meaning to these symbols in the lives of Canberra Vietnamese. Flag stands for patriotism, love of homeland and anti-communist position. Research participants used these elements to identify each other and mark themselves off from Australians and other migrant groups coming from Indochina. This largely political collective identity is the primary focus of

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1Viviani [1984] documents in detail the political joustings between 1975-82 as consecutive Australian governments moved to accept some, and later greater numbers, of Vietnamese. Interested readers are directed to this source.
this chapter. Family, and its mediating role linking the collective political and particularistic economic aspects of Vietnamese ethnic identity, are dealt with in more detail in Chapters 3 and 4.

The Role of the State and the Media in Vietnamese Ethnic Identity Construction

In 1976 the first boats carrying Vietnamese landed on Australia's northern shores, making the country a first refuge. The feeling of vulnerability this provoked in Australians is reflected in the media coverage the landings received. Headlines proclaimed a "Viet Refugee Armada Ready" to put to sea [The Australian 25/11/77]. Repeatedly the Vietnamese were referred to as "hordes" and an invasion. The Canberra Times [27/6/79] talked of "Refugees, and yet more refugees: The milk of human kindness may turn sour". In the same article an unnamed immigration official was quoted as saying "there is absolutely nothing we can do in the event of a new armada of boat people arriving in Darwin or other northern ports this summer" [ibid]. The anxieties behind the post World War II slogan "populate or perish" seemed to becoming a reality.

Partly in response to the outpouring of people from Indochina, the Australian government introduced in 1977 "the first ongoing refugee policy and refugee mechanism" [McKellar; Ministerial Statement to the House of Representatives - 24/5/77], and with it the recognition that refugees are in some tangible way different from other migrants. Cox [1980-79] itemizes the differences as the motivation behind and circumstances surrounding departure from their country of origin, lack of choice of country of settlement, and difficulties encountered in returning to the country of origin. Importantly Australia recognised an international obligation to contribute towards the solution of "world refugee problems" [McKellar; Ministerial Statement to the House of Representatives - 24/5/77].

In the following June non-discriminatory immigration provisions came into effect such that immigrants were to be chosen without regard to "race, colour, nationality, descent, national or ethnic origins, or sex" [McKellar; Ministerial Statement to the House of Representatives - 7/6/78]. Vietnamese applications for entry to Australia proved to be the first major test of the government's new humanitarian and non-discriminatory Immigration Policy. ASEAN neighbours watched to see if Australia had finally rid itself of the stigma of the former "White Australia" policy. Moreover McKellar's statement of 24/5/77 led them to believe that Australia would offer substantial help in resettling Vietnamese. Officers of the Department of Foreign Affairs were reportedly apprehensive. They
felt Australia to be in a no-win situation; damned in ASEAN eyes if the country was seen to be mean with offers of resettlement, and damned for encouraging the export trade in people by the Australian public if it were otherwise [The Canberra Times 28/6/79-2]. Not only was Australia’s reputation in South East Asia on the line but public comment made throughout the region – where the Vietnamese were far from welcome [Grant 1979-147] - coloured Australian perceptions of Vietnamese ethnic identity well before the immigrants themselves set foot in Australia.

Domestic media reports indicate some sections of the Australian public found the presence of refugees both disturbing and unbalancing. The refugees were typically portrayed as destitute, homeless people, at mercy of the forces and therefore somehow out of control [Morgan 1978; White 1983]. At one and the same time Australia was presented as the passive receiver, in a sense a victim of the misnamed, and hence obscured “boat people”. The latter scenario hinted the Vietnamese were in fact in control and orchestrating their plight. Rumors spread of false identities and gold smuggling [The National Times 10/6/78-7]. Accordingly the Vietnamese were renamed “opportunists”, “hijackers” and “queue jumpers” and were, by implication, unworthy recipients of Australian entry visas or charity.

Intrinsic to the label “refugee” are overtones of need, and engendered humanitarian compassion [cf Loizos 1981]. Selectivity is in some way a negation of this finer sentiment. Yet obviously some form of selection was, and continues to be, necessary when more Vietnamese wish to come to Australia than the country is prepared to accept [McKellar 24/5/77]. The choice is made on the grounds of reuniting “immediate” families, the capacity to “settle successfully”, and recognition that Australia must accept “its fair share” of hard core cases; for example the aged, unskilled or incapacitated [ibid]. The latter number has, in fact, been quite small. Thus although crediting the distinction between refugees and migrants, in practice the selection criteria are not vastly different. No matter how they come, favoured applicants are those deemed to have good economic and employment prospects, the so-called prerequisites of settlement success. In addition family reunion provisions – another humanitarian initiative – require long term accommodation and financial support for “immediate” family and, up until

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3 Semi-official sanction given to ethnic Chinese departures after 1978 resulted in ethnic Vietnamese buying Chinese identity cards in order to expedite their own covert travel plans [Grant 1979 Chapter 5].
mid-1985, the assurance of jobs for non-dependent children and siblings. To quote Cox [1983(a)-333] "for the bulk of the [refugee] intake, we can assume a fairly high level of intelligence, initiative, health and general preparation for a viable economic future, and also, in many cases, the prior existence in Australia of potentially supporting relatives".

Funds consolidated these newly enshrined bureaucratic distinctions. Loan schemes (the Committee for the Allocation of Loan Funds to Refugees was specifically for Indochinese), orientation and language classes, the Community Refugee Settlement Scheme, (again the main beneficiaries have been Indochinese) and hosting and friendship arrangements, all evolved from the belief that refugees, unlike migrants, must re-establish themselves from scratch and therefore need greater assistance. Whereas decisions about who would be allowed to enter Australia, in what numbers and on what grounds would remain government prerogatives, McKellar [24/5/77] foresaw a role for voluntary agencies in assisting resettlement, the most notable example being the Australia-wide Indochinese Refugee Associations (ICRA's).

The Canberra branch, established in 1977, plays a significant role in sponsoring and settling of Indochinese in the ACT, lobbies for increases in intake numbers and in some matters liaises between local government and the Vietnamese community. Most of the resettlement groups working under ICRA's auspices are church-based [ICRA April 1983]. Members describe themselves as "like-minded individuals" who share a concern for refugees, and although having no formal connection with any Christian church various members are committed in their faith. ICRA's very existence adds legitimacy to the "refugee" image, while its Christian philosophy makes assistance a moral imperative. But although the significance of this philanthropic society looms large in the minds of Australian government officials, I found the group rarely spontaneously mentioned by the Vietnamese.

Criticism has at times been levelled at the lack of Indochinese participation in

McKellar envisaged some refugees qualifying for entry under family reunion provisions, which has certainly happened. While specific entry requirements have changed since 1977, it is fair to say that newer and smaller migrant families feel at a disadvantage and unable to compete with the older and more established on a test which emphasizes familial financial security; especially as in 1984/5 family reunion was the numerically most significant immigration category, accounting for over 50% of newcomers. This is vastly different from four years earlier when family reunion and refugee intake each made up 18% of the total [see Price 1984-3 Table 1].

In mid-1985 the mandatory job offer required when sponsoring category C family members (brothers, sisters and non-dependent children) was formally dropped but remains an option to qualify for extra points on the test of "employability" which replaced the mandatory job offer. [See The Hon C. Hurford: News Release by the Minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs 3/6/85].
ICRA and/or the settlement support groups. The Vietnamese are the people from Indochina who have most benefited from ICRA's work. And as the oldest and largest of the three Indochinese communities in Canberra many Australians felt the more established Vietnamese were by 1982 in a position to lend a hand. To this end, with prodding from ICRA and the Immigration Department, the Group of Friends of Refugees came into being, a small collection of Vietnamese families (mostly post 1975 migrants themselves) prepared to assist their more recently arrived compatriots. Nevertheless, for reasons which will become apparent settlement assistance for other than kin remains an Australian dominated and, beyond the government's mandate, largely Christian endeavor.

Accusations of preferential treatment accompanied the inception of the above mentioned refugee-oriented provisions. To quote Blainey [The Age 19/3/1984-1] "rarely in the history of the modern world has a nation given such a preference to a tiny ethnic minority of its population". Blainey's remarks referred to "Asian" immigrants in general but the Vietnamese believe they were aimed specifically at themselves. In reply the Vietnamese indignantly insist "we were invited here", but certainly some Eastern Europeans and Lebanese [The Bulletin 15/3/1983-32], for example, believe the Vietnamese entered Australia at the expense of their own relatives. Categorized for some time as "quasi refugees" because they had not fled their homeland, the Lebanese were ineligible for government assisted passage [Price 1984-10]. Responding to these bureaucratic anomalies a Vietnamese community representative explained to me that while the Lebanese in Sydney also have displaced relatives living in "refugee conditions", ultimately it will be easier for them to settle because at a push they can pass as "Mediterranean-looking" members of the dominant culture. In effect my informant's argument boils down to racial distinctiveness, a contentious issue which de Lepervanche [1980-25] suggests the Australian government would rather disguise, focusing instead on ethnic diversity.

Inasmuch as a people's past is recognised by others as important in defining current (and future) identity, the government in effect inscribed Vietnamese ethnic identity by objectifying aspects of recent Vietnamese history. Yet it is far from clear for how long after resettlement the migrant/refugee distinction remains valid. Importantly the label appears to linger long after its circumstantial and material associations have become irrelevant. Writing of Greek Cypriot refugees expelled from their homes in areas of Cyprus occupied by Turks in 1974 Loizos [1981-139]

5See The President's Report given at the 21/10/84 Annual General Meeting for a breakdown of figures on sponsorship by country of origin.
pinpoints a relevant problem. Those affected were seen as victims of a national tragedy for which it was felt they should not have to pay twice - by finding themselves homeless and then condemned to a future of perpetual poverty. But they were also considered guests in houses where they stayed, and therefore their first duty was not to compromise their benefactors. Moral rectitude became "the order of the day" [1981-140]. A somewhat similar ambiguity surrounds the perception of the Vietnamese refugee. On the one hand some argue that having "failed" the Vietnamese in the war, Australia has a moral obligation to assist those now under threat [Morgan 1978-30; Viviani 1984-55]. Accordingly the Vietnamese have every right to be here and enjoy all the benefits of Australian residence [Liffman 1980-9]. But on the other the Vietnamese are thought of as recipients of charity, "befriended" and therefore beholden. As such Vietnamese are required to be well-mannered, agreeable and generally "fit-in". Consequently the repeated use of the word "refugee" is about more than the dislocation to one's life. The label has implications for one's place and future standing in the "adopted" or "host" country. Both elements pervade Australian thinking and also Vietnamese thought about themselves.

The Blainey debate made it blatantly clear that some Australians were ambivalent and nervous about the changing face of their country. Yet well before the media picked up Blainey's remarks car stickers proclaimed "Refugees today: Asian takeover tomorrow" [The National Times 18/8/79-3]. The "willing workers" were damned for being too diligent and threatening to take Australian jobs [The Weekend Australian 13-14/10/79-2]. Allusions were made to the economical ways of the Vietnamese - "a chicken, for example, goes a lot further than it would in an Australian family" wrote The National Times [10/6/78-7] - and their readiness to put up with working conditions intolerable to Australians. The question "can we live in the factory?" threatens the very "Australian way of life" the Union Movement has fought so hard to create. This perceived ability to manage on less exacerbates the suspicion held by some members of the dominant culture that what is saved is sent back to Vietnam to fund further flotillas of "yellow Croats" [Viviani 1984-56], bringing their politics to Australia. They "set up links to Vietnamese resistance groups" [The National Times 12/2/83-8] and are perceived as "still living in the war zone" despite the intervening decade [The Age 17/5/85/-1]. The potential for violence is reportedly not simply between old political enemies. Headlines hint of its appearance within the Australian economic sector: "Mr Nguyen takes his war to the market place" [The Age 12/3/83-supp.3] and "Blood on the strawberries" [The National Times 28/11 to 4/12/82-13] relate concerns about Vietnamese labour and business practices Australians believe to be unfair.
Thus the media paints a certain picture of what it is to be Vietnamese, often through an immediate and personalized style of reporting. Various themes are developed about perceived Vietnamese characteristics - industriousness, frugality, violence, and shady deals for example. Others deemed not to be newsworthy are omitted or belittled. Although it is the Vietnamese who are the subject of coverage, the reporting reflects considerably on the Australian side of the interface. “Every version of an ‘other’, wherever found is also the construct of self” writes Clifford [1986-23]. The headlines quoted above illustrate that not all differences are taken into account when ascribing ethnic labels. Rather people doing the defining select characteristics they believe to be “objective”, part of the everyday, self-evident world and as such available to others members of the society [Berger and Luckman 1966-21]. However their sense of “reality” originates in their own “thoughts and actions, and is maintained as real by these” [1962-19]. This point is elaborated in the following discussion of terms given to Vietnamese in Australia.

The labels “Indochinese” and “refugee” applied by politicians, bureaucrats, voluntary agencies and the media are composite terms which refer to a number of groups of people leaving the various countries of Indochina, namely Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. These people come from diverse racial and cultural backgrounds, have a long history of rivalry with each other and very different ethnic identities (as they perceive it). Even within the category of “Vietnamese refugee” there are ethnic differences. Particularly pertinent to this thesis is the Sino/Vietnamese distinction.6 The Sinos have entered Australia as part of the “Vietnamese refugee” intake and benefit from arrangements made for Vietnamese resettlement. Thus the use of the word “refugee” has typified... and given anonymity to distinct and personal Vietnamese and Chinese experiences. The label has the capacity to “crystallize” and “stabilize” for Australians their own idiosyncratic perception of what it means to be a refugee [Berger 1966-36]; for while the Vietnamese “refugee” is both objectively and subjectively real, the meaning of the label is apprehended by Australians not as an outcome of their own enterprise but rather as something which exists independently of the speaker. From here it is a small step for government funds and programmes to impose the Australian perception of ethnic categories without regard for Vietnamese “reality”. Nevertheless the Vietnamese themselves maintain distinct ethnic identities and boundary demarcation between the various groups arriving from Vietnam (see page 50).

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6The Sinos are Chinese by language and ancestry, but Vietnamese by national origin, a small but distinctive minority periodically persecuted politically and economically by the Vietnamese majority [Tepper 1980-104, 110ff]. The label “Vietnamese” is used to indicate an ethnic as distinct from a national category throughout this thesis.
The Vietnamese are well aware of negative overtones (see page 43) in Australian portrayals of Vietnamese ethnic identity, and endeavour to appease majority fears. Public statements made by Vietnamese community leaders point to the contribution the Vietnamese will make to Australia. For instance, the Pagoda's Venerable [25/5/85] commented "although many members of the Vietnamese community are currently in need of material and/or moral support, it is generally agreed that the Vietnamese are, as a rule, a resilient and hardworking people and that most refugees from Vietnam have the potential to contribute positively to the Australian economy, society and culture". It follows that the Vietnamese debt will be repaid and Australia, the country towards which the Vietnamese voice immense gratitude, has nothing to fear from the Vietnamese presence or way of life. Moreover for entrepreneurs in the ethnic restaurant business, "Vietnameseness" is what Barth [1970-25] calls a "tangible asset", part of their stock-in-trade and as such not to be jeopardized.

In sum the politicians and media perceive people coming from Vietnam as a single entity. But when is it important (as in the quotation above) for the Vietnamese themselves to consider or dwell upon their commonality? Part of the answer lies in the official meaning of "community". This is the usage of the term made by bureaucrats who wish to deal with "representatives" or "leaders" of ethnic groups, people who can speak for the "whole". The notion of community here is based on the dominant culture's perception of homogeneity existing between people of the same stock. Although it may be worthwhile for the Vietnamese to concede that commonality exists when dealing with bureaucrats or issuing statements calculated to calm the Australian public's anxiety, there is no guarantee that "what is shared" will be given much weight in interactions between compatriots.

The Contribution of the Vietnamese Community Association and Vietnamese Buddhist Association

The creation and legitimization of a particular ethnic identity has not proceeded without conflict and debate among the Vietnamese themselves. However it is the particular ethnic identity constructed by the Vietnamese Community Association (VCA) and Vietnamese Buddhist Association (VBA) which provides the backdrop for this thesis, for it is to these organizations that most of the restauranteurs belong and to whose beliefs they adhere.

This section therefore presents ethnographic description of ceremonies and functions organized by these groups at which the metaphorical flag figures prominently as a marker of Vietnamese ethnic identity. The following description also illustrates the role of the Vietnamese Community and Buddhist Association in
the development, transmission and maintenance of Vietnamese "self-knowledge" as the local community sorts out "who we are ... and whom we are among" [Geertz 1983-182]

These two groups propagate a largely political collective identity, a view of the Vietnamese as a banished people and solitary group. Indeed as the following pages relate, an experience which began as a personal tragedy has become embodied in a collective exile charter with an organizational autonomy of its own. Objectified and reified, the charter now confronts Vietnamese as something which exists independently of themselves and asks "how, given our beliefs, should we behave?" Responses to this question highlight intra-ethnic divisions, evidenced in Vietnamese conversation and organised in terms of ideological and socio-economic distinctions that Vietnamese invoke when relating to each other. In part these distinctions reflect the fact that there are two categories of Vietnamese who have come to Australia at different times and under different circumstances. The first, more established, group comprises the Vietnamese stranded in Australia when the South fell in 1975 and unwilling to return home. The majority were students from well-to-do Southern families. Members of this group could reasonably have expected to reach senior and prestigious positions in the years following their return home. But the South's defeat put an end to any such plans. The second, numerically larger, category in Canberra are those people who have fled since 1975, arriving in Australia via transit camps in South East Asia.

In this section I also consider the role in Vietnamese ethnic identity formation played by other associations which purport to speak for the Vietnamese and care for their country. While telling a different version of the Vietnamese story, these associations also contribute to what it means to be Vietnamese in Australia. But first to the identity constructed by the VCA as highlighted at the Moon Festival.

The Moon Festival is one of the most popular events on the Canberra Vietnamese Community Association calendar. In Vietnam it is traditionally celebrated in mid-Autumn. It is a children's festival of lantern making and display, accompanied by singing and eating "moon cakes" and sweets [Hickey 1964-112]. Attendance at the late September 1985 event in Canberra was by invitation only for "outsiders". The guests - largely Australian politicians, representatives of Government Departments, and sponsors - together with influential Vietnamese, were helped to their seats at the front of the church hall by attendants "wearing" their personal commitment in the form of badges of yellow
and red, the colours of the Republican flag. The old regime's colours were in fact given prominence everywhere - as the backdrop to the stage, on the drums and music sheets of The Resistance Band, and in the streamers that decorated the venue. Both the Australian and the South Vietnamese anthems were played, and a minute's silence observed to commemorate those "who sacrificed their lives for freedom and justice". This formality contrasted with the hall's nether regions which filled haphazardly with milling groups of adults and small children.

The evening's entertainment of songs, dances and satires was heavy with nostalgia for the lost homeland, its beauty, the pain of farewells to loved ones, interspersed with expressions of moral support for those left behind. The South Vietnamese flag and anthem merged with a keen sense of loss. Many Canberra-based Vietnamese claim they have an "obligation" to family members remaining in Vietnam "to tell the world" about their relatives' plight, and so have pledged to bear witness to the authoritarian regime. And throughout, elements of Vietnamese identity that adults believe the young should master were given high profile. In his welcoming speech, for instance, the President dwelt on the particular difficulties children face in adjusting to a new and alien culture. He highlighted the need to maintain a sense of harmony and identity through a synthesis of old and new, to find a mid-course between meeting one's duty to the family - posited as "one of our most fundamental traditions" - and pursuit of Australian "individualistic" ways.

Topical issues, directed as much towards the Australians present as to fellow countrymen, received attention within the pages of the evening's programme. One was a criticism of the ABC's Vietnam: A Television History. Many Vietnamese present believed the programme was historically inaccurate and trivialised the Hanoi government's inhuman face. A second elaborated the reasons behind the VCA's attempt to persuade the Australian government to cease sponsorship of the twenty two "cadres" or "Hanoi spies" studying at the Canberra College of Advanced Education. On a lighter note was a cartoon advertising Phao's (see page 64) "Special Viet Breaky" and a plug for a Vietnamese owned supermarket. The importance to the local community of the restaurant trade was reflected in well over half the prizes, arranged on a stand on the stage, having been donated by restaurant families. Thus the community's entrepreneurs had the satisfaction of seeing their economic success publicly recognised, and of knowing that their contribution was indispensable to the evening's proceedings.

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7 The Republican flag comprises three bands of red, representing the country's regions, superimposed on a solid rectangle of former Imperial dynasty and Buddhist yellow [Smith 1967].
Midway through the function the President and his assistants requested with due
defereence, the help of several older, well dressed and suitably seated Vietnamese
men in selecting the prize winners, a duty they were to share with some of the
Australian dignitaries. One can only suppose it is with these men that the real
power lies in the VCA. The men of influence (often ex-officers) apparently prefer
to stay out of the Australian public notice, only taking the limelight at moments
such as this.

The lanterns paraded by the children had obviously been family projects, and the
family rather than the child was recognised in the selection of prizes. All were
electrical goods - an air-conditioner, food processors, juice extractors and rice
cookers. These sit easily with the Vietnamese view of themselves as a scientifically
minded people. There was an array of mechanically oriented lanterns - cars, trucks
and space ships - as well as lotus flowers, the moon and the stars and carp.
Legend has it that the Vietnamese are descended from the dragon and the fairy
spirit and many folk stories relate how the carp, a lowly born farm hand becomes
a dragon, the symbol of nobility and perfection, through success in the meritocratic
exams of the mandarinate which were theoretically open to all. The latter are
symbols of yesteryear, they do not court change but rather disregard the passage
of time and changed circumstances. Some, also rich in historical, political and
cultural meaning, display, I suggest, a conscious awareness of a newer collective
identity. Consider, for example, the UNICEF emblem and the white dove hovering
over Australia. Another, created in the image of the Vietnamese map, had the
mighty dragon and Southern flag superimposed at the 17th parallel. Schechner's
words [1981-5] came to mind - “history is not what happened .... but what is
encoded and performed” - as I watched symbols recalling the recent years of
turmoil pass before me. Here “facts” were in the process of being “rendered”, and
an ethnic identity constructed in the present set within “larger frames of
signification” [Geertz 1983-180]. Once incorporated, these “facts” comprise part of
the Vietnamese “social stock of knowledge” [Berger and Luckman 1966-39],
available to individuals in everyday life and capable of transmission to the next
generation.

The evening of The Moon Festival can be usefully viewed as an example of
“restored behaviour” [Schechner 1981-3], in that it offers those present the chance
to be someone else for a while, to become the heroes and patriots they once were,
or perhaps even were not. Indeed self-justification and belief in eventual justice are

8 Although education was portrayed as the way to move from manual labourer to scholar, in reality the
cost involved eliminated all but a few.
themes common to all the Vietnamese Community Association functions I attended. The promise of a better future is held out to those on the side of virtue providing they remain vigilant and true to their heritage. And by linking a glorious, reified past to the confusing and difficult present, the ramifications of defeat are easier to bear; the perennial questions of life and destiny, good and evil troubling many Vietnamese made somehow less taxing.

The Vietnamese Community Association works closely with the Vietnamese Buddhist Association in facilitating the emergence of a normatively acceptable collective self that marks the community’s political identity. Membership overlaps and officials of each attend and morally support the other group’s activities. Together they project themselves as the guardians of Vietnamese identity and culture in Australia. The Buddhist youth group, boys attired in a quasi-military type of scout-like outfit and girls in the traditional ao dai, are always present at Pagoda and Vietnamese Community Association gatherings, standing to attention as the organization’s respective flags are raised and lowered.

The Venerable also added his voice to a pamphlet produced for a photographic exhibition mounted by the VCA in 1985. The exhibition depicted the atrocities of the current regime and extended support to the resistance movement. The Venerable’s statement concentrated on religious persecution in Vietnam and ended with the following plea to the Australian public:

I believe that you are [always] well aware of the danger of the “red wave” which has been attempting to conquer the world and perhaps occupy Australia, the lovely and peaceful country. Please do not believe the communist propaganda. Finally, my appeal to you today is: Please do something to help the Vietnamese people who are suffering behind the iron curtain of communism [Venerable Thich Quang Ba 21/6/85].

Such anti-communist rhetoric is common to both associations. Many members share the belief that having lived under communism they know its evils better than most, and thus have a responsibility to shake Australians out of their complacency. Interestingly this is not a new message but the repetition of a theme carried south by refugees arising from Vietnam’s partition in 1954.

The commitment to see the homeland free again is reinforced not just by the defeat of 1975 but by hundreds of years of conflict - with the Chinese, French and now communist North Vietnamese - and subsequent re-establishment of Vietnamese political autonomy. Folk tales tell of resolute heroes; victorious in their struggle against Chinese invaders. Out of the present struggle new heroes are emerging to be discussed and celebrated. Witness Vo Dai Ton, the resistance fighter and epitome of the anti-communist hero. Captured in 1982 he refused either to recant
or to implicate his co-conspirators at his trial, despite interrogation by officials of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

Pride in the four thousand years of recorded Vietnamese history and love of homeland, are criteria which Vietnamese employ today to distinguish themselves from other minorities, notably the Chinese, who are among the refugee intake coming from Vietnam. The Vietnamese view the Chinese as clannish, money-hungry and caring little for Vietnam. They are portrayed as opportunists, or economic rather than political refugees, and as not sharing the deep sense of loss which "true" Vietnamese are experiencing.

This collective sense of the Vietnamese as a diminished, yet nonetheless still internally differentiated, people pervaded the Pagoda ceremonies I attended. Refugee life has been "a great leveller" [Nguyen Cam 1985-32] as flight, undertaken in haste or in a clandestine atmosphere, has disrupted familial social standing. Underpinnings of social position in Vietnam - family name, education and wealth - have been either lost during migration, or found to be irrelevant in Australia [Hawthorne 1982; Cox 1983]. Gone are the markers of status (described in Chapter 1) such as prestigious jobs, political office and material goods that once indicated the degree of respect and privilege due their owners.

Reinstating social order is an ongoing Vietnamese production, evident at the Buddhist Vesak⁹ Day and the Vu-Lan¹⁰ Festival. At both ceremonies the walls were adorned with posters tracing the recent Vietnamese history of repression and flight (a key theme in Vietnamese political identity symbolised in commitment to the flag), Buddhist life in the camps and subsequent establishment of a Vietnamese Buddhist Association in Canberra. Lists of contributors to the pagoda building fund were pinned up for inspection. Specification of amounts donated indicated to all present the donors' commitment to the association as well as their financial success during time spent in Australia. Photographs recorded the Venerable in the company of various important persons from the dominant culture. The lengthy reading of congratulatory telegrams from interstate Vietnamese bodies as well as prominent Australians reflects, I suggest, the need of the newly emerging VBA to have its presence recognised. As one Vietnamese put it, it is not so much what is

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⁹Vesak 1985 - the 2529th anniversary of Lord Buddha's birthday - was celebrated jointly by all ACT Buddhist groups, but perhaps to the chagrin of some the day was rather dominated by Vietnamese decorations and cultural display. In 1986 the attempt at a common celebration was not repeated.

¹⁰Filial piety is the virtue remembered and celebrated at the Vu-Lan Festival. At this festival I noted that some old symbols have acquired new, enlarged meaning to fit the changed political realities. For example, some Vietnamese wore a pink rose signifying a Mother alive but still living in Vietnam in addition to the white or red roses traditionally worn on Vu-Lan Day.
said in the telegrams and speeches but the acknowledgement implied in them that is welcomed. They spell acceptance and approval. Australian attendance, particularly of dignitaries, at functions is taken as further proof of the dominant group’s recognition of the minority, the latter sensitive about its reduced standing. “It was we, the (ethnic) Vietnamese, who could ‘point the finger’ (at minorities) back in Vietnam” reflected one person in regard to his own fall from majority status.

The Buddhist leadership is energetic. Not only does the association organize a variety of programmes, but its leaders do their best (through phone-calls and arranging transportation) to make sure members attend. Even detractors grudgingly agree that this is an “up-and-coming group” in the Vietnamese community and a force to be reckoned with in the future. Yet despite all this officials estimate that only about 10% of Canberra Vietnamese are regular pagoda goers, for the most part these are the elderly. This reflects much the same situation as existed in Vietnam prior to 1975 where the Buddhist hierarchy portrayed itself as the guardian of all non-Christian Vietnamese (comprising 80% of the population) but where active participants among the Buddhist faithful were few and far between [Smith 1967-236].11 The Vietnamese Community Association has a similar lack of success in involving eligible members. Mention has already been made of factional conflict that makes agreement over leadership difficult. Similarly Lewins and Ly [1985-46] found Vietnamese associations in Brisbane “hindered at all times by bickering, with some individuals trying to assert influence over other Vietnamese”.

Internal Differentiation

While lending meaning and purpose to their lives in a foreign, none too friendly country, the formalized Vietnamese exile charter and symbols referred to here metaphorically as flag, have the potential to divide as well as unite the Canberra Vietnamese community. Disagreement centres not so much over personal commitment, but rather on how commitment should be expressed and safeguarded for future generations. The “hot heads” - in the main recently arrived young men, with little or no family support in Australia, few skills and a dismal economic future - argue that commitment should be, like Vo Dai Ton’s (see page 49), immediate and tangible or it will fail to impart the sense of mission necessary for

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11 There are other affiliations based on religious persuasion among Canberra Vietnamese - Roman Catholics and Baptists in particular. Not only are adherents few among the families involved in this study, but where they are found they tend to participate in local and therefore predominantly Australian parishes or congregations. Vietnamese parishioners come together as an ethnic group only occasionally to celebrate a mass conducted in Vietnamese, for example.
the continuation of Vietnamese culture and identity. Their stand is at odds with that taken by the more established Vietnamese who arrived earlier in Australia as students.

Many who have arrived since 1975 see these former students as "having gone soft on communism". Various explanation have been put forward, from being absent during the worst years of fighting, to the influence of the anti-war movement in the West. However, as the former students see it, historical circumstances have forged a direct link between the collective identity and an anti-communist position, now a "categorical imperative" [cf Cohen 1974-62] for "true" Vietnamese. Their disagreement with the more militant is less to do with the nature of the communist menace, than with how it should be tackled. They heed the Australian government's insistence that protest must be peaceful and fear falling out of favour if it is not.

It would be a mistake, however, to look on the former students as an independent sub-group, able to disregard or remain insensitive to pressure from the majority. Most are intimately connected with the larger Vietnamese group through the shared experiences of family members, some of whom have been able to join them in Australia. Nevertheless the former students are often perceived as arrogant, and without a doubt have been able to use longer residency and Western degrees to secure better jobs and wealth beyond the hopes of many coming later. Some have jobs as "ethnic workers" or advisers. They act as community patrons at one and the same time as they pursue careers from within. Their position is neither autonomous nor conducive to challenging the commitment of the government to its multicultural platform. Moreover they have achieved socio-economic advancement in Australia, and hence have an investment in the country and the status quo. A backlash would cost them dearly.

Length of residency, and all that goes with it, certainly contributes to the stratification of the local community. Internal economic and ideological diversity pose problems for the VCA and VBA leadership, engineers of a generalized ethnic identity. As indicated above, grasping at symbols shared in a common past is one way of ameliorating centrifugal forces in the present. Here perceived constructive power is grounded in collective resources - ties of blood, language, belief and custom are used by the Vietnamese to set themselves apart as a cultural group from Australians and other migrant groups in Australia. But there is no guarantee that feelings of ethnic solidarity will automatically follow.

An adjunct to directing compatriot attention to the shared past is the use of
gossip. It can be argued, as Gluckman [1963-308] suggests, that gossip enhances conformity to core values and promotes cohesion within exclusive social groups, such as ethnic groups, set off from the larger society. But gossip is a double-edged sword; it can also be about "wreaking vengeance" [Rosnow 1976-91] in a competitive, stratified society, and therefore disruptive to harmony among and between those of unequally ranked strata. Its purpose is to stigmatize rather than reform, and I gained the impression that the scales tipped in the former direction here. For example, during fieldwork, some restauranteurs voiced complaints about the "feel" of the local community. One man wanted nothing further to do with it, saying it is just like being back in Vietnam - full of gossip, disagreement and competition. He added, "they talk and talk yet can't reach agreement to do anything". Another railed, "I know [of] everybody, but know nobody, I am just on my own".

All of this is not peculiar to Vietnamese in the ACT. Lewins and Ly [1985-46] comment that "mindless, unfocussed suspicion" and lack of confidence in compatriots is widespread among Vietnamese communities of Sydney and Brisbane [see also Viviani 1984-140]. Yet the second informant I quote above, like many other restaurant proprietors, continues to contribute to community functions although he is unwilling or unable to attend personally. (I return to this seeming paradox in Chapter 4). Indeed I rarely heard Vietnamese, apart from office bearers in the main Vietnamese associations, refer to themselves using the word community. Rather most chose to talk of "all Vietnamese" or "the Vietnamese people", and represent themselves in this way through symbolic markers that signal their collective identity.

Another "Reality"

Two associations I have not mentioned as yet are the Australia-Vietnam Society (AVS) and the Union of Students. These groups mount the only serious political challenge to the foregoing account of the newcomer's presentation of self. The Australia-Vietnam Society [1978-20], founded in 1975, specifically seeks the recognition of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam and supports the people's efforts "to build a free, independent and prosperous country". The Union of Students is a body formed by Vietnamese students stranded in Australia in 1975 who were/are sympathetically disposed to the current government, and interested to learn about the new Vietnam. Detractors report that the body is now defunct, because members have seen their own kin fleeing to the camps. Supporters, however, say members are currently keeping a low profile because of intimidating threats made to them by more extreme refugees.
I was given the latter reason for poor Vietnamese attendance at an AVS function I attended early in fieldwork when still searching for those groups to which the restauranteurs might belong. The evening centred around slides of a member's recent visit to Vietnam. These were accompanied by sympathetic discussion of various welfare and development projects underway in the country. Over supper the anti-Hanoi bias of the media and the hard-nosed attitude of the Western world toward the communist regime came in for criticism. At the practical level the organization raises funds and collects goods to help with the reconstruction of the war-ravaged country; it also promotes cultural and technical links between Australia and Vietnam.

With only three Vietnamese in attendance I could hardly fail to conclude the people whom I wished to contact were not here. But this is not to say that the Australian dominated AVS, in league with what remains of the Union of Students, is ethnically unimportant. The appearance of an alternative "reality" demonstrates empirically that the symbolic universe construed by the VCA and VBA is somewhat "less than inevitable" [Berger and Luckman 1966-100]. By holding functions to welcome and farewell staff attached to the Vietnamese Embassy, and printing interviews relating conditions and policies in Vietnam, the Canberra branch of the AVS recognizes and legitimizes the current leadership in Vietnam. In doing so it directly questions the VCA's and the VBA's projection of their members as political refugees fleeing the atrocities of a violent and corrupt government. The AVS [1978(a)-6] suggests instead that the so-called refugees are no more than "refugees from underdevelopment", or "aspiring immigrants". As such they should be treated like any other migrant group coming to Australia, and not accorded special treatment.

The political ramifications of this line are far reaching. Not only is the power base of the VCA undermined, but its particular construction of a collective Vietnamese identity is exposed to scrutiny. And if the AVS's view is accepted, some refugee behaviour must be seen in a very different light. Raising funds to support the resistance forces in Vietnam and local Vietnamese press and radio encouragement of violence and intimidation toward "communist sympathizers" in Australia, look less like acts of honour and sacrifice by beleaguered political refugees and more like antisocial or criminal behaviour. The importance of the latter becomes clear when it is recalled that the Australian government has declared that the right to retain and express cultural identity - indeed to receive financial assistance from the State for this purpose - should not detract from social cohesion in Australian society [Zubrzycki 1982-12]. In the final analysis Vietnamese migrants qualify as a members of the wider community by toeing the Australian government's official line [see Chapter 5].
For much of 1985 supporters of these conflicting, but nevertheless socially defined, views of "reality" (refugee of conscience or pseudo-refugee from underdevelopment) battled to impose on each other their particular view of the nature of Vietnamese identity. The debate raged on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the Fall of Saigon - or conversely the Liberation of Ho Chi Minh City. It exploded again over the presence of "the red devils" or students from the Socialist Republic of Vietnam at the Canberra College of Advanced Education. Within a month the controversy was at the forefront again, this time at a conference12 convened to discuss issues related to Vietnam's politics and life-style ten years down the track. Many Canberra-based political and intellectual figures whose opinions are considered important attended. Following a subsequent incident where individuals from the opposing camps jostled each other at a weekend market (and this is equally applicable to other episodes), the President of the VCA wrote, "from the viewpoint of the Vietnamese community in Canberra, the issue is not simply who started the scuffle. Also at stake is the reputation of thousands of refugees and other migrants from Vietnam [The Canberra Times 6/7/85-2". Appeals such as this [see also The Canberra Times 1/8/85-14] to the wider Australian public for "a fair go" for refugees are an integral part of getting the upper hand in the interpretation of events. What better way to throw doubts on the leadership and goals of the opposing position than to go beyond the parties to the conflict and write a letter to the editor of a major daily paper?

Conclusion

In sum, "knowledge" of Vietnamese ethnic identity in Australia is socially derived and negotiated. However, although ethnicity is a product of people's ongoing externalizations it is generally not recognised as such. Rather, Australians and Vietnamese experience ethnicity as an "undeniable fact" [Berger and Luckman 1966-57] which confronts them in their daily lives. In the latter part of this chapter I described in some detail the visual symbols and other mnemonic devices which help to create and sustain this impression and which, taken together, make up the metaphorical flag of Vietnamese collective political identity. Australians and Vietnamese fail to perceive that as part of the social order ethnicity exists "only and insofar as human activity continues to produce it" [1966-50]. Certainly the coherence of Vietnamese ethnic identity described above is grounded in its connection to the past, but its import lies in elements abstracted from the past and woven into an ethnic identity workable in the present and future. Vietnamese ethnicity is thus a reflexive, inventive dimension of current culture contact.

12 The conference was to be located in Canberra but was eventually held in secret in Sydney after the Australian National University campus was ruled out as too insecure.
The dissonance between the categorical distinctions Vietnamese and Australians make, the stories they tell and the visions each projects [cf Geertz 1983-175] in the process of ethnic identity construction have also been described. The analysis points to the fact that the "knowledge" of Vietnamese ethnic identity held by Vietnamese and the Anglo-Celtic majority differs and is indeed part of a contested reality. Which elements ultimately prevail depends in part on the majority's ability to impose its particular construction of reality. For example home-land focused political activity - considered a key defining element by Vietnamese - is excluded, even outlawed, by the Australian state. Thus people deemed "ethnics" do not have the final say over what is culturally relevant to themselves. Other Vietnamese-made distinctions between ethnic and regional groups coming from Vietnam are invisible to the Australian majority and hence ignored in bureaucratically constructed reality. I suggest administrative practices which thrust exclusiveness on some (such as refugees juxtaposed with migrants in government thinking) and ignore other distinctions made by minorities themselves are part and parcel of assimilating the other.

Further, as a bureaucratic principle of social organization ethnicity categorizes minority groups into discrete units based on difference from Australians and each other. Therefore finding common cause with other minority groups is not easy. Rather each minority group believes its problems to be unique and so seeks to use whatever means it can muster to attract the attention of government and promote itself and its world view in opposition to the rest. Moreover the government is able to reward those prepared to participate in the ethnic charade with sympathetic treatment and funds. As both audience and adjudicator, the Anglo-Celtic majority is in a position of domination, more able to have accepted its definition of Australian society, and the Australian way of life.

However membership in the ethnic collective is but one of several, often conflicting, loyalties experienced by Vietnamese. Another equally, if not more powerfully felt identification is with the family. Simply seeing Vietnamese as ethnics reduces the myriad of Vietnamese social relations to a single strand, effectively minimizing cleavages and tensions within the Vietnamese community. Individual aspirations for personal and familial, rather than group, betterment in Australia are ignored. This is not to say that the ethnic label does not have instrumental value for Vietnamese. The next chapter describes the configuration of somewhat self-conscious cultural practices associated with the production and presentation of Vietnamese ethnic food. In this instance the ethnic badge is the means to financial gain and socio-economic advancement of one Vietnamese family vis-à-vis another.
Chapter 3. The Presentation Of Self

The discourse of multiculturalism (see Chapter 1) focuses attention on the mixed heritage and plurality of backgrounds possessed by Australians. Today many places and occasions exist - national days, festivals and ceremonies - where minority groups present their distinctiveness through their food. They therefore participate actively in the creation of cultural diversity in contemporary Australia. This chapter directs attention to just one of these places where pluralism is presented; the ethnic restaurant. I analyse ten Vietnamese restaurants located in Canberra as theatres of action created and controlled by Vietnamese [Goffman 1965]. Here the restaurant staff - the core at least belong to the same nha - use food to guide and control ideas Australians form about them. In the process restauranteurs construct an identity both credible to outsiders and advantageous to themselves. At first glance this would seem to indicate Vietnamese autonomy. However the food served marks the Vietnamese as a marginalized people. Despite advertised professions directing attention to the "genuine", "traditional" and "authentic" nature of the food, the material discussed below shows some of the ways in which Vietnamese in Canberra have transformed and re-interpreted their cuisine to accommodate the Australian consumer.

The restaurant, a bounded social world invariably cut off from outside view by thick curtains drawn day and night, lends itself to a Goffman-style [1965] of analysis of “impressions managed” by the Vietnamese in the regions therein. The setting is the locus of a people who have been propelled through controversy surrounding their arrival (see Chapter 1) into self-consciously constructing a sense of ethnic selfhood that focuses on Vietnamese civility and diligence. However as Goffman [1965-11] writes any projected definition also has a moral character. Inasmuch as individuals or groups articulate social identity through valued characteristics, they feel entitled to be treated in accordance with those attributes. Thus “managed impressions” compel outsiders to take seriously the group image that is being presented and to respond appropriately.

On entering the majority of Vietnamese restaurants in Canberra I was immediately struck by diacritical features declaring “who we are” - the old regime's
flag; the wooden plaques carved in the image of Vietnam with the 17th parallel still intact; religious symbols, some for show in the dining or public area (I recall in particular a large imitation jade Buddha gathering dust in one entrance), and others telling not only of today’s owners, but also of yesterday’s [see Appendix Mai and Cao]. Invariably the designated place of shrines in daily use is in the “intermediate” region, that section found close to the kitchen which staff claim as their own when customers are not around. Restaurant names recall beauty spots acclaimed by Vietnamese, French, and Americans alike - Dalat, Vung Tau, and Cuu Long. Others simply mark the place as Vietnamese - The Viet or The Saigon. Clocks, sometimes two or even three, a few bearing sponsor’s logos feature in the front region. These are a reminder of the place and popularity of wall clocks as prestigious goods in Vietnam during the 1960’s [Hendry 1964-204]. Designs of pearl inlaid wood, a few calendars provided by local Chinese grocers and not uncommonly a gilt-framed European pastoral scene share the walls with pictures and posters of a more Asian tone. Some of the latter depict wet rice agriculture and semi-tropical landscapes found almost anywhere in Asia. Others recall specifically Vietnamese traditions. Particularly popular are etchings of Tet celebrations and Veneration of the Elders, available from Canberra’s “art-deco” shops.

Thus the spatial order of the dining area comprises more than the physical manifestation, or product, of activities conducted in the restaurant. It amounts to a spatial “text” [Moore 1986-81]. The front region portrays the religious and political ideology of the proprietor and incorporates the others - Chinese, European and American - who historically privilege Vietnamese identity. In addition the interior reflects the social conditions currently confronting Vietnamese in Australia. For without exception, all proprietors recognize and respond to the Australian clientele’s expectation of a Vietnamese ambience - fostered by the incorporation of rice paper and bamboo, Vietnamese music, and waiters and waitresses of Asian appearance - to compliment the meal. The restauranteurs use space to inform and support the food to come, effectively signaling their recognition that so-called Vietnamese ethnic food in Australia attains worth through association with the Vietnamese cultural heritage.

Statements of “who we are” further exemplified through the arrangement of the restaurant’s interior space are displays of competence. The expertise of cooks - “Chef/host ex Dong Nai Restaurant, Bien Hoa, Vietnam” - and photostat copies of awards and recommendations of excellence are plastered to doors and walls. These include glowing reports written by the local paper’s gastronomic correspondent and 2CC’s “Restaurant of the Week Award”. Restaurantiers are preoccupied with
being "the first" or "the original", or with having "introduced" Vietnamese cuisine to Canberra. All are ethnically significant in terms of communicating distinctiveness by way of an historical account of the Vietnamese arrival in Australia [Cohen 1969-202]. But these claims and counter-claims also reflect differentiation within the Vietnamese group. They draw attention to the distinctiveness of this establishment vis-à-vis the rest, and assure the would-be customer of the appropriateness of this team for the job, their ability and their authenticity. Indeed I found it of considerable personal importance for Vietnamese to have their role as the leading force in the original student partnership (see Chapter 4), or superior knowledge of Vietnamese cuisine, recognised by compatriots.

The food offered is referred to as superlatively "traditional", "genuine" and "authentic". Thus customers come to know they are spending their money on "the real thing", an impression supported by long and complex menus often sporting in excess of eighty items. Offers of house specialities, banquets and catering services not only seal the ability of the chef but also recognize the importance of those at the tables. Deferential behaviour indicates how welcome and highly regarded the patrons are. "We smile a lot so people like us" is a familiar remark of Vietnamese dealing directly with customers. Indeed as Barth [1970-16] points out stable inter-ethnic relations presuppose a set of prescriptions governing situations of contact. In response the diner is morally obliged to conduct him/herself well, thus ensuring both parties are at ease and so reducing the danger of the inter-ethnic encounter.\footnote{It is worth noticing the frequency with which gastronomic reporters remark on standards of service and how harshly a restaurant is judged if it fails in this area, as happened to an ACT Vietnamese restaurant early in 1986 [see The Canberra Times 8/5/86-8].}

But what of the meal itself? The Vietnamese were colonized by China for just on a thousand years, eventually freeing themselves (as Vietnamese see it) in 939 AD [Burling 1965-106; Hinh Nguyen Duy 1984-1]. Many aspects of Vietnamese culture still bear the mark of Chinese domination. Indeed the profound Chinese contribution to what and how the Vietnamese eat is immediately apparent, something of importance to entrepreneurs who lay claim to a distinct and original product. Nevertheless restauranteurs are confident in their assessment of characteristics uniquely Vietnamese. They are quick to point out the greater use Vietnamese make of fresh vegetables, fruit and herbs. Vietnamese informants believe their "lighter" food is due in part to the Vietnamese preference for boiling and steaming rather than cooking in oil, lack of dependence on cornflour as a thickening agent, or sticky sauces such as "sweet and sour". They grill and roast,
the food is drier and of course they rely on their famous fish sauce *nuoc mam* for flavoring. In short Vietnamese focus on the ways in which their food differs from Chinese. In their estimation Vietnamese food is both superior and more healthy than Chinese. Thus the distinctiveness of their food defines the limits of the social group, and when praising the fine quality of Vietnamese food the restauranteurs are in fact celebrating Vietnamese cultural cohesion. However I found Vietnamese who are not involved in the restaurant trade less certain in their assessments. Some admit they are unsure of the difference between Chinese and Vietnamese food; one believes the Chinese are better cooks. Another informant told me “a complete menu” could not be compiled from purely Vietnamese dishes alone. The latter highlights not only the importance of Chinese culinary legacy, but also the Vietnamese conception of Australian ways of eating and, by implication, the Australian character detailed in the pages below.

While some informants recognise that it is not always clear exactly which is a Chinese and which a Vietnamese dish, can anything be said about the constitution of a recognizably Vietnamese meal in Vietnam? Are the same elements discerned in Vietnamese restaurants in Canberra? For the mass of the populace in Vietnam a meal is based on the alimentary trilogy of rice, fish and *nuoc mam*. The wealthy may add beef, chicken or pork, and festival days are marked by all who can with a meat dish of some sort. But for everyone rice, usually prepared separately rather than mixed with other foodstuffs, is the pivot of the meal. The central place of rice is also evidenced by its association with psychological security (see Chapter 4), and presence at religious events indicating that it is a sustenance worthy of the ancestors. Meals may be more interesting with the addition of meat and vegetables, but rice is indispensable. *Nuoc mam*, the liquid drained off containers of salt and fish and allowed to ferment, is also considered essential. These key elements - the central place of rice and *nuoc mam* - continue in the Vietnamese restaurants of Canberra. They have been joined by “emblemic” foods [Prosterman 1984] such as *cha gio* and *pho*, ethnic markers which customers take as epitomizing Vietnamese fare. *Cha gio* are described as “Vietnamese spring rolls” or even “Vietnamese Imperial spring rolls”. Well might the uninformed or uninitiated ask “how do they differ from spring rolls Australians have long

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2 Informants did not call my attention to any of the major schools of Chinese cuisine - Cantonese, Teochui or Sechwan, for example. Rather they simply invoked a parallel between Vietnamese and Chinese cuisine.

3 These are spring rolls filled with minced pork and seafood and served with a dipping sauce of vinegar, sugar, grated carrot, *nuoc mam* and perhaps a little chilli.

4 See Introduction; footnote 4.
procured from Chinese restaurants?" Chinese spring rolls, I was told, are "big, fat,
oily, things filled with vegetable, especially (cheap) cabbage, and no (expensive)
meat". My Vietnamese informant finds it "impossible" to eat them.

Distinctiveness lies, however, not just in the food but also in the way it is eaten.
The utensils used for food preparation in Vietnamese kitchens bear witness to the
Chinese heritage; stir-fryer, cleaver and chopping block for slicing food into small
portions, and rice cooker which is unique in that it is not interchangeable with
other cooking vessels. So do the implements Vietnamese employ for eating - chop­
sticks which form an extension of thumb and forefinger, appropriate to food
needing no further cutting and used in conjunction with small bowls. Australians
have come to expect these accoutrements, accompanied by small dishes of sauce
and cups of tea, but in Vietnamese eyes Australians fail to employ them properly.
Thu, for example, expressed astonishment at Australian reluctance to lift the bowl
from the table and take it to the mouth. The Australian practice of leaving the
bowl firmly on the table contradicts Thu's conception of the recognised way to
bring food to be eaten. Previous experience makes her confident that hers is the
correct and Vietnamese way. Similarly Kim, while excluding Vietnamese claypot
stews from the menu on economic grounds, believes her decision justified by the
Australian expectation of finding sliced and chopped stir-fried dishes. She
vindicates her stand by pointing to the Australian inability to eat "big pieces"
with chopsticks. "Anyway", she laughed, "it looks funny, Australians don't know
how to eat them (big pieces)". Thus both informants employ eating styles as
more that symbols of group difference. Inappropriate table manners can also be
taken to reflect the other's inferiority [cf Cohen 1969-202].

Further, the informant mentioned earlier (see page 60) believes menus in
Australian restaurants need to be structured according to at least three separate
and distinct phases. Within each there should be a selection of dishes so that
each Australian customer can make a personal choice. The transition from entrée,
through the maincourse, to dessert requires a movement from savoury to sweet,
with periods of eating punctuated by periods of non-eating [cf Douglas 1975]. This
Vietnamese man has a different memory of meals bought with friends after work in
Vietnam. The foodstalls he patronized typically limited themselves to one type of
cooking, be it grilling, soup-making, stir-frying or whatever, and offered not more
than a dozen items dependent on this process. Menus were at most an
undifferentiated list of items available. Dishes were selected for the whole group
by one or two of those present. Soup arrived together with the meat, vegetable
and rice dishes. Mark ups were small making "eating out" only a little more
expensive than preparing food at home. Sweets, snacks and fruit were procured
From different but neighbouring food stalls in the same market complex, or from street vendors on the way home [see also Hoskins and Shepherd 1970, Chapter 3; and Sully 1971-37f].

Douglas [1982-85] contends that "the ordering of social relations and the organization of food" mirror each other. Certainly the Vietnamese would agree. For despite competition among the above mentioned vendors, established practice in Vietnam was for customers to gather at one stall yet order from all. Further the sociability of Vietnamese - in particular the bonds of affection and solidarity felt by Vietnamese family members - is said to be reflected in the communal dishes of food consumed by Vietnamese in unison. In the process of constructing their own identity around food the Vietnamese also comment on how they perceive Australians; "one plate, one person" eating symbolizes the coldness and independence of the Australian "free life".

The Australian and, as the Vietnamese see it, "individualistic" habit of ordering separate dishes throws restaurant kitchens into confusion. While the three or four available burners are ideal for producing a steady flow of communal dishes, they are impractical when faced with a number of separate orders all expected to arrive piping hot at the table together. The restauranteurs find these incidents embarrassing and anxiety provoking, and feel unable to offer patrons either an acceptable explanation or adequate service. Misinformation and real or purported lack of knowledge of another group's food can be taken to indicate cross-cultural tension. Incidents such as these renew, I suggest, the sense of Vietnamese/Australian cultural separation. Herein lie seeds of inter-ethnic collision for, given the equipment available, it is well-nigh impossible for restauranteurs to accommodate the customers demands.

Other points of difference between Vietnamese and Australians, potentially fraught with danger and confusion, are more easily avoided. Language and pronunciation difficulties are circumnavigated by "ordering by number". Menus add a description in English after giving Vietnamese names, so diners have a good idea of the dish they will get. These cover not only the ingredients, or what makes up the dish, but also the tone - "delicate", "very mild chilli" "a highly refreshing dish" to name a few. Tables may be set with chop-sticks, but offers of knife, fork and spoon are commonplace. And menus incorporate the structure of the European three course meal: entrées have been teased out and desserts added. The fare accommodates the Australian palate: less rice, more meat or fish, less spice and nuoc mam. In some places salt and pepper and/or tomato sauce are available for the asking. Yet for all this servings still remain Vietnamese, recognizable and distinct from the
larger portions of forthright food, individually presented and not greatly transformed or civilized through cooking, which Vietnamese perceive as Australian food.

Nevertheless it remains pertinent to ask where the much advertised authenticity is located. Is it in the foods considered worth eating, or in those crucial ingredients and staples present in predetermined and relative proportions? Or is it to be found, as Farb [1980-185] suggests, in the "flavour principle?" Certainly Vietnamese claim their food is made unique by the addition of lemon grass (ignoring its use by Thais, Laotions and Burmese), and other fresh herbs used in conjunction with various sauces created by adding condiments and spices to a nuoc mam base. But how important are these distinguishing features now that world trade has largely ended local isolation and a vast array of "foreign" foodstuffs are available in Australia, albeit at a price? Moreover are "traditional", and by implication unchanged food forms found in Vietnam before departure, the only "authentic" or "pure" food. If so how, if at all, does this fit with the domestication of the "genuine" product to suit the non-Vietnamese consumers' palate?

Firstly it must be recalled that despite claims of originality Vietnamese food, like Vietnamese ethnic identity, is in fact a hybrid. Mention has already been made of the Chinese contribution to Vietnamese cuisine, but marks of past contact with Chams, Khymers and more recently the French are also apparent. The former however are largely ignored or re-interpreted. Coconut milk, used as a thickening agent in curried meat and vegetable dishes throughout the sub-continent and in countries such as Burma and Cambodia historically influenced by India, is occasionally attributed to recent French influence by some Vietnamese. French labels add status and a civilizing tone. The menus at Canberra restaurants where there has been considerable input from the well-to-do former Vietnamese students discussed in Chapter 2 abound with "pot-au-fues", "pâte de la maison", "julienne" vegetables and marinades of Napoleon brandy. A thoroughly Vietnamese title heads "the most delicious French entree", while sweet-corn and chicken soup which Australians commonly think of as a Chinese creation has become a "French style soup". On questioning these I was reminded proudly of "the many very good French restaurants in Saigon".

Rather than producing a "pure" or "traditional" Vietnamese dish, chefs see it as more important to present something patrons associate as Vietnamese, or at least Asian. One manager's experience has led him to believe that Australians have little idea about what constitutes Vietnamese food. It is up to him to expand
Australian choices beyond a few well-known favorites. Thus he consciously makes decisions which reshape and reinterpret Vietnamese food. His ideas, incorporated in new food forms, are then conveyed to consumers. Substitutes or adjustments do not necessarily negate, as long as ethnic markers or symbols are still present. Hence the importance of those emblemic foods already mentioned.

As innovators restauranteurs walk the tight-rope between faithfulness to their heritage and appeal to would-be customers, mediating in effect between tradition and change. As well as being good value for money (see page 87) Vietnamese also claim the lightness of their food is "good for digestion". Thus it does not come as a surprise to find Vietnamese food promoted as "healthy food", low in cholesterol and salt, both common concerns of health conscious Australians. Some Vietnamese restaurants in Canberra proclaim their interest in "dietetics" by marking with asterisks dishes considered particularly healthy. Here salads become "dieters" salad, and chicken "defatted" before cooking. Yet when informants recall important events marked by celebratory meals in Vietnam, it is invariably the sheer quantity of the food that is remembered. In Australia the aesthetics have changed. What is considered nice now is the food's lightness and slimming properties. Through their attention to Australian consumer demands the Vietnamese in fact inscribe their own identity as the processes involved in ethnic identity construction demand "seeing others against a background of ourselves, and ourselves against a background of others" [Fischer 1986-199].

Some idea of the degree of negotiation made by Canberra's proprietors can be experienced by visiting Vietnamese restaurants in Cabramatta, which cater almost exclusively for their fellow-countrymen. Needless to say, the amalgam of selfconsciously presented cues that betoken "Vietnameseness" and descriptive menus with French labels are absent. There are no table-cloths or place settings, no flowers or candles, no formal bills or receipts, no mention of diatetics, no salt or pepper, and no Australian customers although I am sure they would be welcomed. However, only the most outgoing is likely to feel comfortable entering what is obviously insider territory. The food here is not perceived as ethnic. Patrons are won through the provision of "good food" at "good prices" rather than through atmosphere and decor. And, despite being demanding of space, large circular tables predominate in all but the pho shops. These reflect anticipated social interaction; the development of harmony and commonality between Vietnamese diners who are ingesting the same sustenance together.

Witness also Phao's "Viet Breaky", the sole service which looks to the Canberra Vietnamese population for patronage. These Saturday and Sunday mornings are
far less formal affairs than the rest of the week's trading. Phao rolls up his sleeves and removes his black tie. Tables are not "set", instead containers of chopsticks and soup spoons - available for collection by diners - grace the ends of tables. Orders are shouted towards Phao and the kitchen generally as customers leave briefly to buy cigarettes or a Vietnamese newspaper from the Chinese grocer next door. Emphasis is on price; the selection of items has just expanded from eight to fourteen, all costing between fifty cents and four dollars each. The restaurant also carries news (in Vietnamese script) of interest to the local Vietnamese population. Posters advertise forth-coming cultural events, for example the forthcoming tour of a Vietnamese band from America and the photographic exhibition mentioned earlier (see page 49). Having eaten, many customers order again, eventually leaving carrying bags bulging with "take away". Hence traditional food and ways of eating help hold the Canberra Vietnamese community together with minimal strain and provide a common link with the past.

Despite the transformation of Vietnamese food in Canberra restaurants catering for Australians the product continues to be recognised as "our food" and is eaten by the proprietors and their families, either at the restaurant or sent home in plastic containers. But there is a point beyond which the fare is considered unfit for Vietnamese consumption. This is reached when Vietnamese food becomes "fast food". The only proprietor of a "fast food" outlet - chosen in preference to investment in a restaurant because of the owner's limited pool of labour - described his product as neither Vietnamese nor Chinese but rather "update" or "high tech" food. Neither the proprietor nor his family eat it; he likened the idea to eating chicken after working all day at a chicken farm. They prefer to cook again when they get home.

Food habits communicate boundaries between categories of people [Douglas 1975]. Here a particular point of departure is reached. What can and cannot be eaten marks the ethnic boundary; fast food is alienated food, a product of technocratic rather than Vietnamese culture. Certainly meeting the demand for near instant gratification intrinsic to the "fast food" trade places considerable strain on the kitchen's capacity to produce food rapidly. Despite a menu of some eighty items only around six are made each day, and these have to withstand both advance cooking and the drying effect of the warmer lights. Obviously foods protected by batters or sauces survive the best. In this business competitors are nearby hot-dog stands, pies, pasties and sandwich bars. Consumers are after convenience rather than "authenticity". This is depersonalized food, perhaps eaten alone at some office desk rather than consumed sociably with others. The origins of the food may once have been Vietnamese, but it has been changed beyond that which they can accept.
There is, then, some validity behind every tourist’s desire to “eat where the locals eat”. Inherent in this preference is the recognition that a restaurant requires an “insider” or “honest” audience to be faithful to its cultural heritage. But how then to account for the near total absence of Australians in Vietnamese restaurants catering for co-ethnics, indeed their discomfort at the prospect of finding themselves frequenting “insider” territory? By responding sensitively to the Australian customer’s desire for ambience, cleanliness and order, the Canberra restauranteur makes the establishment a gentle, non-threatening introduction to himself/herself and to “the other” in general. In this safe environment customers find it pleasant to try the food of strangers, albeit toned down and domesticated in order not to offend the uninitiated palate. The fare remains Vietnamese enough to be interesting, but not so different as to be dangerous. And customers wishing to demonstrate greater intimacy can personally request a particularly spicy or hot dish, indicating familiarity with the “insider” and their habits. Thus people who are reluctant to voice their ideas about inter-ethnic sociability can express them through food.

Consider the case of Hung. Hung invited his son’s class to eat at the restaurant as part of the school’s Asian studies course in the hope they would conclude “nice food” went with “nice people”. Nevertheless Hung is well aware that the food he chooses to eat at home would not find favour with Australians; he expects they would reject it as too pungent and too spicy. In the restaurant the virtues of the food and the virtues of the people are experienced as reflecting each other - inasmuch as the food reflects the owner, the food must be right. Diners, looking to experience vicariously another’s culture through consumption, may be ethnocentric and fail to perceive the bifocality of the ethnic mirror. But their expectations, however naive, cannot be ignored.

Other aspects are down-played, in particular real or threatening intra-Vietnamese differences. The restauranteurs, the majority of whom originate from South Vietnam, are quick to point out that it is only the North Vietnamese who find dog a delicacy. Southerners⁵ on the other hand would never touch dog. They recognise that Australians find dog eating offensive, and categorize those who indulge the habit as “unnatural” or “inhuman”. Strange food equates with strangeness, and few Australian mothers fail to teach their children not to accept food from strangers. A rebuff of an offer of food is no small slight for it implies

⁵Hickey [1964-15] and Hendry [1964-187] disagree somewhat over this. Hickey reports the villagers of Khanh Hau (located in the Mekong Delta) eat cat, but not dog which is considered the guardian of the house. Hendry on the other hand writes that the villagers eat both, though infrequently.
mistrust. Similarly, while relating tales of foraging expeditions into the Camau forests [see Appendix Tran and Bichi], Tran and his family tempered their excited descriptions of hunting pigs and monkeys with remarks intended to assuage my doubts that monkey is edible. Pigs, however, required no further comment. The family have learned their ethnic lesson well, for they recognised the boundaries of “their” familiar versus “my” familiar. It takes one of me (an outsider) for “them” to know “us” (an insider) and “our” ways.

The majority of today’s restauranteurs were not involved in this line of business in Vietnam; indeed many had little cooking experience even in the domestic setting, let alone for a living. One man described his mother’s letters that contained recipes so complicated he couldn’t use them. He reflected “it would have been all right if I’d known something about cooking - in the early days we threw a lot in the bin”. Another relied on mailed instructions from his wife, a domestic science teacher still in Vietnam. And most experimented at home, endeavoring to achieve a minimal level of competence before adding the dish to the restaurant’s menu. The disparity between the authentic and competent Vietnamese cooks advertisements profess these informants to be and their perceived amateurish offerings destroys the “sacred compatibility” [Goffman 1965-40] between man and job. Indeed the public have been offered an idealized self that is not easy for the Vietnamese to sustain. However, as mentioned at the start of this chapter, projected definitions carry a moral load. The Vietnamese cook ought to be what he/she claims to be, for not to possess the advertised culinary skills casts doubt on the Vietnamese being the kind of people they claim to be as well - that is sociable, civilized, and diligent. Consequently the Vietnamese forfeit the right to be valued and treated by Australians according to the Vietnamese definition of the sort of people they are, and the sort of people Australians visiting the restaurant ought to see them as [Goffman 1965-12].

Other purely economic compromises also threaten the credibility of Vietnamese guided impressions. For instance tensions exists between the routine provision of “personalized” service and maintaining throughput. These undermine the managed impression (see below) of Vietnamese as foodsharers before food profiteers. Bacchanal images abound of losing oneself through eating and drinking tongue-loosening delights: “if you have plenty of time and wine, don’t hurry the rice. Enjoy the Vietnamese gastronomic philosophy by frolicking around the entrees, just like you would share the wine and enjoy the pleasure of dining together. This caption heads up the menu at a restaurant where tables are filled two or three times over on a Saturday night, and a full dinner rarely takes longer than two hours. And regardless of long and elaborate choice-laden menus, diner
attention is directed to the day's specials, while waiters and waitresses recommend a select number of dishes, so making the cook's job a lot easier. Foods that demand a disproportionate amount of time or tie up other resources are simply not offered. Thus Vietnamese clay-pot stews are omitted from most menus because they have to be made in advance of orders, can only stand a limited amount of reheating, and leftovers are unable to be transformed into something else. Deep fried crabs, which flavour the oil and hence require the exclusive use of a deep fryer, suffer the same fate. Other foods lend themselves to economy. Spring rolls are the prime example; much unsold food can be minced and added to the next day's filling. Despite being fiddly to make, large batches are produced at one sitting and frozen until needed. Little wonder cha gio have been promoted as an "emblemic" food; they encapsulate Vietnamese frugality and diligence.

All this has to do with the profit motive which, although important to proprietors must not impinge too heavily on customers. Neither should sweated family labour, nor the role of the family business as the means to help relatives through the web of Australian immigration requirements [see Chapter 4]. These and the dirty work, the piles of dishes, the sheer drudgery of preparing quantities of finely sliced vegetables must be kept out of sight. But at the same time customers need to know why, or for what, they are paying - to be aware that things are being done on their behalf. Hence the importance laid on the finer, expressive qualities of food and service. Food in particular is judged in terms of its sensory qualities; it 'looks' appetitizing, 'smells' appealing and 'tastes' interesting. Informing and focusing would-be customers' attention on the qualities of the food is part and parcel of concealing the economic importance and dependence of these restaurant families on Australian patronage. For their part customers display an almost heart-felt need to be deluded, to be assured of the fare's authentic and aesthetic value. They collude, perhaps unknowingly, in a "complicitous silence" [Bourdieu 1977-189] over the restaurant's strategic value to proprietorial families [see Chapter 4 and 5].

If the technical side of the food's production is to remain hidden the "front" and "back" [Goffman 1965, Chapter 3] must be segregated. Curtains, screens and counters make access to the nether regions difficult, keeping strangers shepherded and confined to the front region. Only trusted team members - family, staff and my sponsor, for instance - travel freely between the dining and kitchen areas. Language adds a further barrier; people switch into Vietnamese at the threshold. However, difficulties crop up at critical junctures when rules of separation apply [Ardener 1981-20]. Many restaurants use a bell to keep staff in the back (from where they are unwilling to venture out) in touch with others dealing with the
public. The device allows for communication across the threshold while maintaining underlying regional divisions. For all intents and purposes the kitchen staff remain invisible. Their appearance would undermine the construction of Vietnamese as neat, clean people. Black and white uniforms, or more informally at least neat casual clothes, are not part of back region attire. In their place are T-shirts and old jeans that sport cooking already done.

Yet internal boundaries are flexible, and during the quiet hours the family and casual staff spill over into the intermediate zone, taking it as their own. For example, after the lunchtime rush is over Phao locks the front door, dims the lights and allows everyone to unwrap blankets and take a nap. Similarly Tran and Bich's many children lounge about with friends in this zone during the late afternoon. Cards are brought out, a tape played or "Perfect Match" switched on. Offerings of grapes and mandarins are removed from the shrine, picked at and consumed along with Cokes and cigarettes. Gone are the standards of politeness and deference found when customers are present and tasks, such as the laborious peeling of rice papers, may be carried out at the dining tables. Conversations, previously carried out in hushed tones, now reverberate between the regions; the banter sounds harsh and tonal to the unaccustomed Australian ear. By behaving in a back region manner the family transforms the setting into just that, despite its geographical location in the public or front region. This occurs without danger for only a few hours in between peak business times. Come evening and the informality is soon replaced by elaborate and deferential service to customers. The shift in behaviour signifies that Australians are "no ordinary member of the group, and wariness may be required" [Ardener 1981-22].

The guarantees and credentials which confer on this group the right to produce and sell Vietnamese food have already been mentioned. But what of the idea of an Australian entering the trade? Any such suggestion brought forth laughter and derision from the restaurateurs. "Australians don't know" they said, implying that Australians are disqualified by some natural law, or lack of appropriateness or ability. Interestingly Kim's husband, a Chinese with some twenty years as a chef behind him, was discredited for the same reason [see Appendix Kim]. Kim laments the dilemma this poses, for she is the first to recognize that profits require as many nha members as possible contributing labour to the business. Regardless, she excludes her husband saying "he wouldn't know what to do in a Vietnamese restaurant". In his place she employs her nephew, paying him wages and complaining that he eats not two or three meals a day but five!

6Perfect Match is a computer dating game run on commercial television in Canberra.
Certainly entry into the world of Vietnamese restaurants has been partially restricted to community members [see Chapter 4]. But to profess that Australians "don't know" and presumably could not come "to know" runs counter to the conventional wisdom behind the flood of foreign cookbooks and sale of foreign cooking utensils and ingredients seen in Australia since the early 1970's. These reflect the belief that cooking skills can be acquired. However there is an essential truth in the Vietnamese position. I suggest that it is not so much that Australians couldn't learn the necessary skills, but that they are not accredited members of the relevant category of "Vietnamese". Racial diacritica indicate that Australians do not share common descent with Vietnamese. Common descent is of course a basic defining criterion of ethnic ascription, and taken as indicating access to privileged cultural knowledge associated with descent such as cooking skills. An ethnic Vietnamese restaurant run solely by an Australian would be somewhat of a disappointment to the public, the food would not seem genuine, no longer "the real thing".

Thus as potential competitors Australians do not threaten those Vietnamese already established in the industry. However the position of the Chinese Vietnamese (or Viet qoc Hoa as they were officially known [Barton 1981-363]) is more problematic. Not only are they physically similar, but they are also heirs to much of the same cultural and technological knowledge. The debt owed - but rarely credited with due worth - to Chinese influence in Vietnamese culinary heritage has already been remarked upon. Although the Vietnamese have deeply and widely imbibed aspects of Chinese culture, Vietnamese tend to focus not on what they share but rather on how they differ (spoken language, cuisine, clothing and character for example); they also emphasise distinctly Vietnamese ways that are said to have survived a thousand years of Chinese colonization [Hinh Nguyen Duy 1984-1]. Writing of the years just prior to the French period Marr [1971-18] reflects, "the mass of Vietnamese probably had rather short memories regarding the foreign origins of much of their culture ..... If the average Vietnamese was at all aware of the debt he owed China, he apparently was not particularly concerned about it". The situation is further complicated by lack of clarity about who was, and who was not, Chinese in origin (see page 30). The children of Chinese/Vietnamese unions, the Minh Huong, had access to both cultural traditions. Some consider themselves Chinese and publically maintain Chinese identity, while others are almost indistinguishable from the Vietnamese majority.

Although sharing much historically and culturally in common, the Viet qoc Hoa are not trusted members of that heritage. Without doubt there are good historical reasons for Vietnamese ambivalence toward Chinese competition and fear of
economic domination. Vietnamese anxieties in this regard came to the fore early in fieldwork when a profitable Vietnamese restaurant was sold to a partnership of several couples whose links with Vietnam are tenuous. One of the partners could assert a previous association with the country, but they claimed primarily Chinese descent and had residence in various East and South-East Asian Chinese communities prior to coming to Australia. Speculation was rife regarding the high price paid and the goodwill this represented. More importantly the restaurant remained a "Vietnamese" restaurant and continued to do a good trade. My sponsor refused to approach the partners, declaring "they’re all Sinos, not one of us". The Vietnamese entrepreneurs charged the partners with threatening the image of Vietnamese restaurants as the cheapest in town, damaging the good name of Vietnamese food by using monosodium glutamate, and hinting that a couple lived above the restaurant, possibly contrary to local regulations. Other commercial interactions between the Vietnamese and Chinese in Canberra have not always come to a mutually satisfactory conclusion. A case in point is the "update" fast food outlet mentioned earlier. The current owner walked in off the street, introduced himself to the Viet qoc Hoa in charge and negotiated the purchase. Too late he found the lease on the premise was about to expire. Only the intervention of an influential Australian saved the situation.

The "Sino" restaurant’s continued good standing in the public’s eye indicates that despite cries of disapproval from the Vietnamese, it is perfectly possible for Vietnamese food to be marketed successfully by people other than Vietnamese. The Vietnamese claim, quite rightly, their situation is further confounded by Sino/Vietnamese ethnic differences that are not recognised by the untutored Australian eye. As the Vietnamese see it Australian criteria defining ethnic group boundaries do not coincide with Vietnamese self-ascription or the interaction patterns between group members themselves. However, protecting a slice of the market is only a part of Vietnamese anxiety. Just as important is the sense of pride the Vietnamese have invested in "their" food, especially as food both distinct and superior to the Chinese, the "other" with whom Vietnamese must battle most vigorously of all in determining their own identity. Vietnamese exclusiveness is directly challenged by the Viet qoc Hoa [Chinese-Vietnamese] propagation of what the Vietnamese consider as their product, and when denying the appropriateness of

7I heard "Sino" used in two senses during fieldwork: to refer to an alien category of "other", and uttered as a disparaging remark which threw doubt on an "in-group" member’s parentage and so challenged the legitimacy of the latter’s membership.

8The use of monosodium glutamate is not exclusively Chinese. In fact the popularity of many Chinese and Vietnamese restaurants in Canberra was threatened by its perceived over-use some years earlier.
outsiders to market it, the Vietnamese are as much marking group boundaries and restating their sense of selfhood as discussing the transmission of cooking skills. The fact that the origins of Vietnamese cooking lie in China can be safely disregarded for once "we cook it", or "do it this way", what was borrowed becomes "ours", detached from its Chinese roots and part of "our property". Thus when the Vietnamese lay claim to a unique/distinctive food that only they can rightly produce they are protecting far more than their businesses; they are protecting their very selves from outsider onslaught. However that self, like the food, is an an everchanging entity perpetually incorporating aspects of privileged others.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that Vietnamese food, employed as a symbol of the other, "objectifies" relations between the minority and majority [Cohen 1974-30]. The recent popularity of Vietnamese food needs to be set against the political circumstances of Australia in the 1970's and 1980's when reaching across ethnic boundaries became politically desirable. Eating is one way the Anglo-Celtic majority expresses the new spirit in which Australians relate to migrants and handle ethnic differences generally. Here I have shown that although not perhaps prepared to eat monkey or dog, Australians today are prepared to eat some of the foods of those whom they had previously called "monkey" or "dog-eaters". Thus, discourse about the nature of present and future Australian society in the era of multiculturalism is partly conducted through the consumption of the "other's" strange food.

However, the Vietnamese food Australians consume is a somewhat selfconscious creation needing to stage authenticity and genuineness, despite the food's acculturation. This state of affairs tells perhaps more about the consumer that he/she would care to admit. The search for authentic food is, I suggest, related to Western/Australian longings for purity and products of a pristine heritage. These themes pervade majority conceptions of multiculturalism (see page 103). But the search for the gastronomic is in vain. As remarked upon Vietnamese cuisine is, like most others, a hybrid laid down layer upon layer during contact with the Chinese, Khymers, French, Americans and now Australians. However, should the Australian patron become aware of this the product would no doubt be robbed of some of its attraction. The Vietnamese entrepreneur realises that the popularity of his "ethnic" restaurant is partly due to the mysterious essence of difference that can be ingested with the food. He/she relies on ambience to support these impressions, and on trusted team members - family, friends or at least other.
Vietnamese - not to destroy them. Regional segregation keeps from customers the fact that there is no mystery to so-called ethnic food. It is no more nor less than minority home-cooking gone public and in the process transformed to suit Australian tastes. At the same time it needs to be borne in mind that Vietnamese cooking is also exclusive knowledge; it is part of Vietnamese cultural capital that Vietnamese believe requires protection in Australia [see Chapter 4].

Failure to meet stringent academic and western criteria of authenticity does not mean the food is not "ethnic". Food makes more than just good eating; it is also a commodity "good for thinking in" [Douglas 1979-62]. To refer to Vietnamese cooking as "ethnic" is to place oneself in relation to "the other". Ethnic is, I suggest, reserved for those things and their fabricators who are perceived to be remote from the Anglo-Celtic majority. A meal at the Pizza Hut, for example, is unlikely to be called an ethnic experience; there diners do not delude themselves that they are ingesting authentic Italian food. Grassby (see page 8) may claim ethnics are all Australians from all backgrounds, but ethnicity is experienced as a compelling force only for a minority. As Vincent [1974-377] writes ethnicity is "a tool in the hands of men ... a mask of confrontation" concealing, I suggest, the asymmetry between the producer and consumer of Vietnamese ethnic food, the minority and majority. Anglo-Celtic consumer preoccupation with aesthetics is a disclaimer, a refusal to acknowledge that business is business and, as will become clear, denies the circumscribed place and relative powerlessness of the majority of Vietnamese in Australian society.

In this chapter I have described food as a symbol of Vietnamese identity in Canberra. I pointed out that restauranteurs anchored themselves by using cuisine as a marker of common descent, a symbol in their new environment of cultural cohesion and social bonds forged in a shared past. Food also communicates Vietnamese sociality, first and foremost between family members and by extension between the larger group. Indeed eating is an activity long associated with deep-rooted assumptions about the world and one's place therein [Firth 1959; Dumont 1970]. I have highlighted the part played by food in community formation, and thus in articulating themes inscribing, on the one hand, Vietnamese political identity. At the same time food's preparation and presentation by the restauranteurs and their kin articulates the family (nha), and its role in promoting the more individualistic aspects of Vietnamese identity. Food therefore mediates flag and family - the collective and the particularistic dimensions of Vietnamese ethnic identity.

Food as metaphor for contrasting Australian/Vietnamese social relations and
family life-styles is described in more detail in the next chapter. There the connections between food sharing, food production and the Vietnamese family are elaborated, and the particular place of family in ethnic identity formation explored.
Chapter 4. Kinship, Community and Economy

This chapter examines the generation of income by Vietnamese proprietors capitalizing on aspects of Vietnamese socio-cultural heritage, while simultaneously reproducing those aspects. In particular the focus is the restaurant as a place of practical activity, a primary social context which provides a "lived in" experience of what it is to be Vietnamese and "do things" in the Vietnamese manner. In the process of food production, family labour mediates between ethnicity as cultural content and economic self-interest. Here we see how kin relations, conceived by Vietnamese as a fundamental element of their ethnic identity in Australia, are grounded in the practical work of food production.

The following examination of the place of practical activity in creating and re-creating a Vietnamese ethnic identity presumes with Pierre Bourdieu [1977-167] that "what is essential goes without saying because it comes without saying". It is not discourse which determines experience, but the "taken for granted" or "givens" of the "natural world" [1977-164]. Tasks, like the "conversations" discussed earlier, demand the incorporation of standards, beliefs and moral commitments. And given the crisis, as many Vietnamese perceive it, of Vietnamese cultural contact with Australians and Australian life-styles, I suggest that what is done rather than simply discussed is important.

I turn now to the household and restaurant as locations of productive activity.

Family, Food Sharing and Food Production

The association between food and family is strong in Vietnamese thought. For example, a woman's ability to prepare rice is taken as evidence of her domestic proficiency, and in Vietnamese proverbial wisdom rice is likened to a mother. Hence rice and fish are said to be "as inseparable as mother and child" [Te 1974-57]. Among ACT restaurateurs, the nha is the basic unit of the domestic economy in which food resources are pooled and meals cooked and consumed. As explained in Chapter 1 nha members comprise the residential group which "eats from the same rice pot". Family meals instil the importance of harmony and hierarchy in interpersonal relations. In addition food parcels provide and maintain
links with relatives who remain in Vietnam. And for those families participating in this research the restaurant guarantees a supply of familiar food which ties individuals together in relation to a shared past.\footnote{Vietnamese resistance to eating in the communal dining rooms of Australian migrant centres is remarked upon by Viviani [1984-180]. She suggests it is not simply that the Vietnamese did not like the food. Rather gathering together to cook and eat in the bedrooms (although forbidden) reinforces familial roles and cultural values. Morrison and Moos [1982-59] also mention this practice in the transit camps on Guam.} Thus for this particular occupational sub-group the nha is also the food-producing unit. Listing the advantages to running a restaurant one manager said "you can eat too!", highlighting the fact that unlike the mass of Australians the Vietnamese still retain a collective memory of hunger. Nor does the memory belong in the long distant past. A refugee from the South recalls that, after 1975, "rice was rationed, and the rationing system was so unreliable. When people did get some, it was never enough to feed the family" [Allen and Hiller 1985-443].

The Vietnamese typically set up a restaurant as an owner-operated business registered in the joint names of husband and wife. Partnerships between Vietnamese are rare, indeed during fieldwork only one came to notice, details of which will be given below. Opinion is divided over the merits of starting a new restaurant rather than buying another family out. In 1985 the latter option could cost up to A$100,000 for a prosperous business in a good location. Certainly if capital is scarce setting up a business can be a good deal less costly, particularly if the premises are located in one of Canberra's suburban shopping centres rather than the inner city. Most families have done just this, converting old offices and shopfronts, doing the necessary painting, woodwork and even furniture construction themselves. Others have bought cheaply the restaurants of their compatriots on the verge of bankruptcy. Nevertheless most families have found it difficult to raise the necessary funds.

I was fortunate enough to be in the field when a Vietnamese restaurant was "on the market". The following description of the transaction serves to illustrate both the familial and intra-ethnic flavour of the Vietnamese restaurant business.

Tran and his wife heard on the Vietnamese grapevine that Mai and Cao wished to sell. Investing in a restaurant appealed to Tran as the means to "set something up for the children's future", a way of securing for them the means to their own livelihood, independent of the goodwill of others. With little grasp of English and no formal schooling in Australia the older children's employment prospects looked decidedly bleak. Furthermore neither Tran, his wife nor three of his four sons had been able to find work since their arrival in Australia three years earlier. The two families were amicably acquainted - Tran had met Cao soon after settling in Canberra.
The purchasing family had between them savings of A$2,000 and managed to get several loans of between A$2,000 and A$3,000 from relatives and friends. Together these totalled around A$16,000 - a bank loan was not forthcoming - and the sale price was A$52,000. The money already raised had changed hands by the time I was introduced. Nevertheless Mai and Cao continued to work in the restaurant. They received wages while instructing the new family in the necessary skills. This is a common enough Vietnamese practice in Canberra when the purchase of an established restaurant is being negotiated. Time spent working side by side was considered a benefit to both buyer and seller. It gave Tran's family the chance to watch the throughput carefully, and gauge if they could expect to recoup the A$2,000 they estimated they needed each week to get by, or the A$3,000 to pay off loans and make life comfortable. If they found that the level of trading was unsatisfactory, or not up to what they had been led to expect, they could still pull out. The standard Australian procedure of "looking at the books" was not a viable alternative because Mai, finding keeping the books difficult and complicated to keep up to date, had in fact not done them for the last year. Mai and Cao used the opportunity to judge the reliability and future business prospects of Tran's family for they anticipated they would have to leave money in the business. After a few months when both families were satisfied, Mai and Cao began to pull-out. Nevertheless they continued to call in, "to check on us, to make sure things are going O.K. and we are looking after their equipment" said daughter Ben. At the close of fieldwork the business name had still not been transferred, and presumably this would not take place until the debt was further reduced or cleared.

In fact the business did well under its new management. The last contact I had with the family was on a busy Saturday night when eight nha members were at hand - father, mother and the two elder sons in the kitchen, and the four daughters waitressing. And it was largely on this basis that the family's business prospects looked promising to their fellow countrymen. They had access to inside information about the family that is either unavailable or felt to be irrelevant by major Australian financial institutions. More credit was available because of the size of the family's labour pool than Tran could have hoped to raise on his own. Nor will he alone shoulder the debt; it is a joint liability that every family member is now feverishly trying to repay. Moreover, when adults and youths plough back what would otherwise be their wages, they are effectively committing themselves more and more fully to the family enterprise.

Young people, then, have a very real influence on the standard of living a nha is able to enjoy - their role as the poor man's economic capital is no small thing. They are expected, and expect themselves, to give unstintingly of their labour to the business. For example Lihn, faced with an unexpectedly busy Saturday night, telephoned home, and within twenty minutes two extra pairs of hands arrived by taxi. Any suggestion that perhaps the young workers may have been otherwise occupied or unavailable met with startled surprise, not just from Linh, but also
from Van the interpreter who presents himself as holding more progressive ideas
than some of his countrymen. Both were adamant that "no-one would refuse, its
an obligation to the family". The more senior allocate the labour of younger
members (at least until the latter's marriage) as they see fit. Such rhetoric
illustrates that "family obligation" and "family loyalty" are experienced as ties that
bind, beyond question or dispute. These values belong to the "taken for granted"
of the "natural world" [Bourdieu 1977], and are only brought into explicit
discussion through encountering a person from another culture. To the Vietnamese
it "goes without saying" that children are in debt to their parents for their birth
and upbringing, and all that the parents sacrificed by fleeing Vietnam. Their
perceived indebtedness enables the cyclical relations of production between
Vietnamese generations to be renewed.

As contributors of labour the young stand to benefit from the restaurant's
financial success, through claims to nha resources both immediately and in the
future. They refer to "our restaurant" - rather than "my parent's" or "my
father's" - and identify closely with its progress. As young adults they do not
plan to leave home to live in flats or group houses. Rather they remain with
their natal nha until marriage and perhaps longer. Should the enterprise fail, the
family not only loses its livelihood, but also social standing for the possession of a
restaurant gives status and prestige. The business, in effect, "bears" the family's
name and marks their social place. Nha members are credited with "working
harder" and "caring more", and when domestically based relations of trust and
mutual responsibility carry over to the business setting they have considerable
influence on the enterprise's profitability. All sensitive positions - cashier and cook
in particular - are reserved for the family wherever possible. Casuals and part-
time staff are said to be unreliable and have "no sense of responsibility". "They
just take the money and go" said Phao's eldest son. Tales are repeated of food
wastage and thefts. Certainly a pool of nha, and therefore unpaid, labour gives a
proprietor a competitive edge by releasing often meagre liquid resources for other
uses. Yet, as recounted later in this chapter, docile and unenergetic staff are not
without their compensations.

Returns from the business may constitute the major, if not the complete nha
budget. The owner/manager does not draw a salary for him/herself. Only
requirements needed to cover nha expenses are taken out; extra cash goes to repay
debts as quickly as possible. And earnings from "outside" wage labour are often
handed to parents. Thus Ben gave her pay, earned as a casual waitress for Hung,
to her father. However her brother does not follow suit. His father excuses him
on the grounds that wages from his job at a chicken farm go toward paying off a
car. The car is available to every nha member - to ferry them to doctor's appointments, shifts at the restaurant, or whatever. It also doubles as the business vehicle, transporting produce bought at the local fruit and vegetable market to the restaurant.

All of this points up the absence of a clear cut separation of private wealth from business property, nor is the line delineating business from domestic accounts absolute. It is the domestic unit which is the significant boundary in the flow of resources and expenditure. Here decisions to do with consumption and saving are made, and frugality imposed in favour of future investment. The propensity to pool effort and resources effectively distinguishes each nha from other Vietnamese households in the ACT. Further, pooling is an activity which transcends the differentiation in terms of sex and age on which each nha is based; it "abolishes the differentiation of the parts in favour of the coherence of the whole" [Sahlins 1981-94].

In Vietnam the domestic kitchen was traditionally a female domain. And although restaurants were a family concern, my informants indicated that women generally worked in the kitchens while men held managerial positions. Migration and the new circumstances have not led to a major re-alignment of the sexual division of labour. Nevertheless the female contribution to the restaurant trade in the ACT is not belittled, nor are woman invariably given the lower status jobs. Who should be "out front" in a hosting/managerial capacity is a pragmatic decision made frequently on the basis of fluency in English [see Appendix Mai and Cao]. When necessary husbands and brothers turn their hands to scraping plates, washing dishes and slicing vegetables. Nha members recognise that a small business requires the flexible application of labour, a preparedness to pitch in where needed during peak trading hours. Thus working in the family restaurant entails much more than learning to perform certain technical or artistic skills. Through task performance the Vietnamese social order, and the values this encodes, is apprehended. Further, the very nature of the work demands that hierarchical relations based on sex and age be tempered by recognition of the ties that bind.

Decisions concerning business expansion and further investment are not based solely on the family labour currently available in Canberra. People whose passage from the camps in South East Asia is anticipated are also taken into account. When news comes that a family member has reached the camps, sponsorship forms are lodged by relatives, and efforts made to facilitate the official procedures from the Australian end. Accordingly migration has served to heighten, rather than diminish, the importance of kin ties. Established Vietnamese families have an edge
over the less well established, because under Australian Immigration guidelines the ability to maintain and offer a relative employment may make all the difference between the application's success or failure [see Chapter 2; footnote 4]. Restaurants are thus instrumental in gaining entry to Australia for kin, particularly a resident's spouse, siblings and parents, or more distantly the child of a parent's sibling. These are the categories of relative most often assisted, although it must be remembered that Australian government regulations curtail possible choices.

It is for this reason - to bring out their parents and younger brothers and sisters - that the partnership mentioned above continues. The partners, who are three siblings, are all married and have established independent households, each with access to at least one white collar salary. Thus although they own property in common (the restaurant), the partners do not comprise a commensal budget or residential group. Economic dependence reflected in the arrangement of productive roles typical of those who share nha membership is therefore diffused and so reciprocal exchange has been lost. The partnership suffers from tensions over the division of profits and allocation of time off. Co-operation becomes problematic "when one or other partner wishes to follow a chosen career and perhaps even move elsewhere" said an informant. Yet the restaurant door remains open. Marriage and the new loyalties it brings may weaken the solidarity of the Vietnamese sibling group. But the parent/child tie is of a different order; it cannot be duplicated. Gluckman [1955-19] labels it a "multiplex" relationship - affectively charged, and with the continuing propensity to integrate.

Initially the newcomer will work in the relative's business but this is not envisaged as a long term proposition. Hung parted company with his sponsoring brother after two years and he explained: "it is better to be on one's own, otherwise disagreements come as people have different ideas on things". Similarly Lihn who joined his wife's family after marriage and currently lives with them in a three generation stem family, openly discusses his plans to set up independently or buy his father-in-law out in the years to come. Notwithstanding that Lihn "manages" the business (and his wife was made a partner before her father went interstate), Lihn wants to be in the position to start something for the sole benefit of his child and any future children he may have. He is adamant they will not be expected to share a source of livelihood with their cousins, the children of his wife's siblings. Nor is Lihn prepared to work and live with his in-laws for ever, although he will be "eternally grateful" to his father-in-law for his sponsorship to Australia. Lihn's case is not an exception. Son-in-law and daughter are economically subordinate positions, and the Vietnamese in Canberra generally accept that the wish for economic independence will predominate with marriage and
the birth of children. Marriage marks the beginning of the developmental process whereby the natal nha fissions, independent residences are established and control over productive and reproductive resources is redistributed [cf Fortes 1971-4].

**Making a Living**

Restaurants demand a large input of labour and capital in their early years. Inevitably this is when the latter is in short supply, so Vietnamese proprietors substitute family labour for capital expenditure wherever possible. Few labour saving devices are found in Vietnamese restaurant kitchens, yet they are valued items as evidenced at the Moon Festival (see page 48) where all but one prize was a domestic labour saving device of one sort or another. Generally these are said to cost too much to purchase on a commercial scale. Available equipment is both simple and versatile. The cleaver, for example, not only chops meat but scales fish, slices vegetables, and the dull side crushes garlic. Chop-sticks are used to stir soup, remove noodles from boiling water, turn and move food around the wok as well as to eat. Gas applies instant heat to thin sides of the wok, transmitting it rapidly to the finely sliced raw foodstuffs. Cooking, in contrast to the preparation of ingredients, takes little time and therefore fuel bills are minimized. None of these are new, or original to finding oneself a restauranteur in a foreign country. All are part of Vietnamese material culture, a heritage restauranteurs brought with them and continue to use, but whose significance goes deeper than just cultural competence or mastery. These "transposable dispositions" [Bourdieu 1977-72] embody the habits of frugality and diligence instilled through bodily practices which "mediate a personal realization of social values, an immediate grasp of general precepts as sensible truths" [Jackson 1983-337]. And when "cultural competence" is inserted into the Vietnamese productive and reproductive systems it becomes "cultural capital" [Bourdieu 1977-186].

Vietnamese restaurant work, then, is labour intensive and technologically simple; a high proportion of adult, and near adult, Vietnamese can master the techniques readily. Hence all but the very young can contribute their labour. Saturday night finds Thiep's eleven year old son manning a deep fryer. "He's very scientific, like his father" said Thiep. "He times the spring rolls on his digital watch and pulls them out precisely on time". The father's pride in his son's ability and contribution is reminiscent of the prestations and counter-prestations of confidence and trust that Benedict [1968-3] describes as passing between Indian fathers and sons; these prestations were crucial to the success and continuity of Indian East African family enterprises. The importance of the reciprocal exchange of confidence and trust for the perpetuation of Vietnamese kin ideology and familial enterprise will be developed later in this chapter.
The \textit{nha}, as residence, and its associated business are spatially separate in Australia. (This arrangement was uncommon in the third tier of the South Vietnamese economy; see page 30). Nonetheless a number of restaurant tasks - dessert making and laundering for instance - are transferred to the house in Canberra. Further family members of both genders turn their hands to renovating and cleaning, some grow herbs and vegetables in their back yards. Thus transactions Australian owner/investors contract out are commonly performed by the \textit{nha}, and "make or buy" decisions invariably resolved by family members contributing greater amounts of time and human effort to the business in the interests of thrift. All reduce costs and resist the commodification of Australian capitalist society and, along with this, reliance on outsiders and any attendant difficulties or risks in regulating on-going, contractual relationships. Consequently contacts with members of the wider Australian society are limited and cultural differences persist. Both outcomes reinforce the foundations of ethnicity in personal and communal dependence as opposed to reliance on the impersonal, individualistic modes of relations which typify Australian commodified society.

The Vietnamese restaurants in the ACT work on the principle of a low mark up coupled with maximum throughput. Take-away services boost the latter while also reducing average unit costs: in-house diners require proportionally more of the staff's time and capital equipment. Variable costs are kept to a minimum by recycling unsold perishables or consuming them at home. Businesses stay open for long and unsocial hours, seven days a week. Yet, interestingly, many informants said running a restaurant in Vietnam was far more arduous. In Vietnam it was not unusual to start selling \textit{pho} and other breakfast foods at around dawn and to remain open all day, changing the dishes offered to suit the hour.

For the majority of \textit{nha} members the opportunity cost of their labour in Canberra is low - there is not much else they (as a family group) could be doing productively with their time - while the marginal utility of income is high as the extra dollars earned by additional hours of labour can be put to many uses. By increasing the hours and range of services, that is by intensifying and elaborating the use of the existing structure through the addition of more labour, a greater income is "squeezed out" without the need to commit much additional capital. Thus a man I perceived to be a comparatively wealthy and well-educated Vietnamese proprietor described himself as "poor" and "at a disadvantage" because, he explained, of his limited access to labour. His viewpoint is in direct contrast to that taken by many Australian entrepreneurs who aim for increased returns through business expansion based on continuing capital investment, rather than on the application of more labour.
When further elaboration or intensification in the family enterprise is impossible other forms of "self exploitation" may be found [Geertz 1963]. For example Mai and Cao opened their restaurant only in the evenings as the suburban location did not warrant lunchtime trading. With only dependent children, and therefore a wages bill to be considered, the returns from doing so would have been insufficient. To supplement their income, they spent their days at home doing piece-work for a local clothing company, using what would otherwise be idle or slack time to spread risk and secure at least a minimum income each week [see Appendix Mai and Cao]. Moreover the cost to the Vietnamese of business failure is substantial - in all likelihood it spells future dependence on factory employment - which has, I suggest, a bearing on the Vietnamese predisposition to participate in "self exploitation". However it is not factory work per se, demeaning as it is perceived to be, that wholly accounts for Vietnamese dislike of such work. Rather the Vietnamese point to the fact that Australian wages and salaries bear no relation to the number of nha mouths: one worker simply equals one pay packet. A proprietor who might have been able to find work in the lower to middle ranks of the government sector decided against it for, in his words, the salary was "mere subsistence". In preference he and his wife set up a business which allowed them to improve the ratio of nha workers to dependents. This man was in effect saying that the return to the nha from his labour in the competitive wage earning sector was not as favourable as the return he, his wife and family could make together from self-employment.

However, the nha as the food producing group is by no means a self-contained, autonomous entity. It is through transactions with individuals and groups in the larger Vietnamese collective that resources necessary to restaurant management are secured and made available to those who claim, and are recognised as having, membership.

**Intra-Ethnic Dependence**

Perhaps most importantly for entrepreneurs the community is the locus of labour. There are, broadly speaking, two ways to find workers. One is to phone another proprietor and find out the names of Vietnamese looking for a job. This, however is a hypothetical option only. Making such inquiries reflects badly on one's standing in the community and entails a loss of face. The preferred procedure is to ask among one's circle of friends. Either way the ethnic boundary channels social interaction and employment opportunities, so developing a Vietnamese "endo-culture" [cf Cohen 1969-203]. Even if not personally liked, and indeed some entrepreneurs are viewed with suspicion, they cannot be ignored. With jobs to
offer, entrepreneurs mediate between inclusion in the Vietnamese moral community and exclusion and the associated status of nonranked person. Around proprietors collects a beholden group, the members often nurturing dreams of petit bourgeois status themselves. In return for work, they have news to swap, information to pass on and deference to confer.

Of course the most desired workers are people who share nha membership with the proprietor. This is not simply because of economic considerations; it reflects the intimate connection between household and restaurant, making business secrets family secrets also. Failing this, other known labour is preferable to the unknown. Certainly shared knowledge makes for efficiency and smoothness of operation where Vietnamese is the lingua franca. But Australian legal provisions regulating employer/employee relations also play a role. Although authorities will only act on such questions as worker's compensation, wage rates, overtime, sickness and recreational leave entitlements after a complaint has been lodged, the Vietnamese speak anxiously about the mass and complexity of this legislation and where possible would rather avoid it. Trusted labour is known labour, relatedness means that behaviour can to some extent be anticipated, that the actors are "playing the same game" according to a shared understanding of the rules [Barth 1970-15].

With jobs to offer and as mediators with the larger society, restauranteurs are in a prime position to interpret to their more isolated and marginalized countrymen the standing of the Vietnamese group in Australia. Mutual interests are said to be at stake. Rhetoric is used to highlight Vietnamese dependence on one another in the face of the dominant Anglo-Celtic Australian society. Beholden labour is compliant labour, dependence is reinforced by common knowledge of unemployed compatriots and the ambivalence that surrounds Vietnamese refugee status in Australia. Some Vietnamese report being ever conscious of "the inferiority of a person without a state, a person without a country" [Hawthorne 1982-322]. The homogeneous interest of "the whole" is implied when claims are made that "unwelcome attention" would be to the detriment of "all" Vietnamese. Here the Vietnamese share much in common with Greek migrants who, in the period prior to World War II, found themselves to be "perhaps the least popular foreigners in Australia" [see Kakakios and Van Der Velden 1984-147]. Greek isolation and social marginality reinforced the need for self-employment [ibid]. Hence, like the Greeks before them, Vietnamese recognition of the privileged position of entrepreneurial families is obscured by the manifestation of economic dependence as ethnic solidarity.

Reciprocal relations of paternalistic benevolence and loyalty expected of employers
and employees, and debts incurred during chain migration, are other ideological levers consolidating petit bourgeois economic power. Expressed in Vietnamese cultural idiom, each entails pleas directed at the employees' very "Vietnameseness". They enlist the perceived dependence of employees and indispensability of employer in the "best interests" of both. The "success stories" [see below] are built not solely on parental claims to children's labour, but also on the exploitation of cultural heritage, marginal position and physical appearance of other Vietnamese. Ethnicity here is the language of differentiation and privilege, in effect a smokescreen behind which class interests are pursued.

Loans are a further product of community participation, available at more favourable terms than Australian financial institutions allow. Bank dealings are generally disliked - they are perceived as involving "too much paperwork, too many regulations and too high interest". Rotating credit associations (hüis), although popular among Sydney's Vietnamese intent on setting up small businesses or buying a taxi license, have not been major sources of finance in Canberra. Hüis are organised to raise funds for furniture or a second-hand car, I was told, but not for the larger sums needed to purchase a restaurant. Mention has already been made of the contrasts between Vietnamese community life in Cabramatta and Canberra (see page 19). These have, I suggest, some bearing on the use of hüis as a source of credit. To be run successfully hüis require a community located within a small geographical area\(^2\), coupled with a sufficient level of trust. Neither condition is well met in Canberra.

Familial savings accumulated from wage labour, loans from relatives and friends, or only very occasionally a personal loan from a bank or credit union, provide needed finance. Loans from friends are attractive because, despite the moral debt, "all the advantage is to you and no risk". And sometimes a fellow competitor will come forward with funds. Thus Hung loaned Tran's family "A$2,000 with no interest charged!" Hung's preparedness to forgo interest brought forth particularly favourable comment. Certainly Hung knew the family well having previously had the opportunity to observe various teenage members at work; his money was not in any danger. Hung's name as a kind and altruistic community member has been enhanced, particularly as Hung is theoretically a competitor, albeit on the other side of town. Importantly Hung has proved he has the virtues expected of his status as a prominent local identity. Tran's family now feel in "the greatest debt"

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\(^2\)Commenting on sources of credit in Vietnam, Barton [1981:258] notes that even family members living more than a few kilometers from the hui organizer will not be asked to join because of difficulty collecting their contributions. For a discussion of the workings of hüis in Vietnam see Hendry 1964:213; Hoskins and Shepherd 1970:80; Barton 1981:249.
to him, a debt they are hastily trying to acquit. Indeed their burden is two-fold - monetary and affective, the latter incurred by the generosity of the loan. Thus seeming ethnic co-operation also conceals the domination of other compatriots.

Of course the status ascription of Vietnamese ethnic identity comes with a personal price [Barth 1970-28]. As indicated above the community contains collective resources necessary for the *nha*'s livelihood and social standing, but it takes money, time and effort to tap them. Indeed entrepreneurs are expected to contribute goods, money, and labour to community functions. A number comply on request. Hung for example is prepared to buy and marinade meat, while Kim gives cash but has "no time" to do more. Fieldwork left the impression of a somewhat forced generosity - the obligation to "help the Vietnamese people" is recognised, but experienced more as a duty than a personal pleasure. Material contributions signal donors are good and patriotic Vietnamese, ready and willing to support the community. Their behaviour is beyond reproach, even if they fail to attend the gathering. Donations are, I suggest, a means to "adequately act out" [Barth 1970-28] the roles required to realize Vietnamese ethnic identity and thereby create access to collective resources. Moreover entrepreneurs whose businesses are grounded in Vietnamese family and community traditions are those least able to afford to take liberties with accepted values or charters. The few whose assistance is not forthcoming are vulnerable to gossip linking their failure to suspicions of communist sympathies. And, although competitors, restauranteurs share a mutual interest in protecting the Vietnamese heritage and the economic underpinnings of their businesses along with it. In short they collaborate in acting as gatekeepers of the social institutions and agreed upon values which encompass the Vietnamese ethnic markers of flag and family while simultaneously competing vigorously with each other in the economic realm.

Intra-Ethnic Competition

Historically the first Vietnamese restaurant in Canberra was set up in 1977 by five (unrelated) students, joined soon after by one of the early "boat people". The students aimed to "break in" to the local market by undercutting Chinese restaurants prices, the cheapest available in the late 1970's. A decade later, the Vietnamese continue to work on the principle of low mark up, and generally do not perceive the presence of other inexpensive food outlets - also frequently run by migrants - as the source of greatest competition. Hung summed up his views on the matter as follows: "Thai food is too expensive, Chinese too heavy and oily, Indian too spicy and therefore bad for digestion. And anyway where a main course at any of these places will cost you about A$7.50 the price in a Vietnamese
restaurant is A$5.50. So if the Australian palate is not discerning, the hip pocket nerve will send them in the right direction. Thus Vietnamese proprietors are a collection of entrepreneurs who, having positioned their business at the lower end of the Canberra market, now face each other as competitors.

During fieldwork I was impressed by each proprietor's knowledge of other Vietnamese businesses. The innumerable quotes of rents paid and seating numbers a competitor could expect on a Saturday night added substance to the comment "we watch each other" and search for information on popular dishes and prices from compatriot competitors. Advertisements set one restaurant off from another; the "little one" only has meaning in relation to the implied "big one" located in the same shopping centre. And checks to entrepreneurial self-interest are few. Reputation - good or bad - need not impinge on patronage when community and customer are separate and distinct.

Competition between Vietnamese proprietors stems not just from those already established in the trade. When I traced the origins of Vietnamese restaurants in existence in Canberra in 1985, I found an intricate web of relations as past employers and employees\(^3\) enveloping the majority of these business ventures. Thus current employees cannot be ruled out as competitors in the making. Of course some restaurants have gone out of business and it is now difficult to ascertain how, and by whom, they were started. But the majority have links stretching back to original student-run business mentioned above. This partnership was fraught with tension and argument. Out of its collapse sprang several more enterprises, owned independently and manned by the students' families who were now beginning to arrive in Australia. Still others have been begun by former "casuals" who initially found work in the restaurants of fellow countrymen.

To keep out Vietnamese competitors certain sensitive jobs must be protected. Knowledge is of course one source of economic power, and petit bourgeois Vietnamese reportedly consider it "unwise" to reveal all they know. As one proprietor said "it is foolish in business to freely allow access to information and skills". In particular the cook's job requires protection. As a full-time job it offers security and the chance to save. Moreover the occupant is in a position to build up an intimate knowledge of day-to-day restaurant management. Certainly Phao and Tien, and Mai and Cao all launched themselves from this position. In his turn Phao - although not having discussed personal plans with his full-time kitchen hand - is quick to point out the realities of the man's position. He is

\(^3\)Only one restaurant appears to have established independently of prior contact of this sort.
alone in Australia, unmarried with no familial support and therefore without access to labour; the man’s proprietorial prospects are poor. Similarly Hung admits he would not employ someone who came asking to be taught the trade. The active instruction displayed by Mai and Cao during the months their sale took to conclude (see page 77) is not typical of day-to-day employment. Aspirants to proprietorial status must pick up skills and "know-how" beyond his/her particular responsibilities by watching and listening. And excessive interest, zeal or ability are not necessarily good things. A weak, submissive or docile stance in an employee is perceived as unthreatening and therefore conducive to job security.

Material Success

To take advantage of any competitive edge an entrepreneur must maintain some autonomy, or ability to act independently. Proprietorial choices and business decisions are constrained to the extent that restaurants are embedded in the Canberra Vietnamese community. Hung is one proprietor who manages to juggle his good name and particularistic business interests very successfully. He invests generously in the Vietnamese community [see Appendix Hung], and is frequently cited as someone who has done a compatriot a good turn in the past. For instance, Hung graciously consented to reinstate a former kitchenhand who had left to start his own restaurant. The man found himself bankrupt within twelve months. Generosity, to quote Sahlins [1981-133], is "a manifest imposition of debt", a way to cement lasting asymmetrical relations. Yet it did not go unnoticed when Hung invested in a dishwasher. A young man who had previously found casual employment washing dishes commented, to his chagrin, he had "become redundant". But, given Hung’s past record, behaviour which could be taken as morally reprehensible to the larger group was generally explained and accepted as merely technologically efficient.

Phao is another successful trader. He and his wife began by working for another proprietor, and in fact moved with the man to a larger restaurant during their employ. But Phao saw there was neither security nor future advancement in this casual arrangement; whenever the owner’s children could work Phao and Tien were not needed. Thus the couple saved and watched how business is conducted in Australia before leaving to open a place of their own two doors down the street. As would-be proprietors they had a lot in their favour. Phao had past managerial experience, and husband and wife had at one stage run a restaurant together in Vietnam. And their four teenage children supply most of their labour requirements. Phao preserved distance - and therefore is under less obligation - to the Vietnamese community by going "outside" for business advice and to find part
of the initial capital (a Lebanese neighbour, met through Phao's skill in mending cars, guaranteed a bank loan for them). Today the family has run their former boss out of business, and they are spoken about with some awe. The family's success is admired as it validates the collective Vietnamese dream of a rosy economic future in Australia. Accounting for their good fortune Phao argues a restaurant's "individual" style is important and must be cultivated. He says "nine of us are different from nine of us; none of us are the same. All have our own taste and personality and there is room in the market for all". Nevertheless the family's ability to undercut prices offered by their previous boss is significant. While Phao did not draw my notice to this, many other Vietnamese made a point of doing so!

A final illustration of the meaning of success involves the family who recently sold out to the "Sino"s" (see page 71). The initial establishment costs and the restaurant's sale price some six years later are common knowledge and frequently commented upon. The family's economic success is admired, if not envied. They are reported to be the first Vietnamese millionaire family in Canberra. Disparaging remarks are heard hinting at possible Chinese origins, and once of communist connections. But regardless, their newly-made wealth is becoming legendary. In contrast, the social details of those who have failed or gone bankrupt are hazy. Names cannot be recalled, whereabouts are unknown. They are passed over, almost dismissed with the remark "probably gone to a factory job in Sydney".

Reproduction of the Social Group

Vietnamese food knowledge is a collective Vietnamese resource, and food production in Canberra is one avenue open to Vietnamese to reinstate order and familial self respect. Indeed cultural distinctiveness has provided the raison d'être of the ethnic restaurant, as well as the wherewithal to carve out and monopolize an exclusive niche on the periphery of the dominant economy. However perpetuation of the Vietnamese food trade depends on the continuing availability of willing workers, prepared to forego immediate personal consumption in favour of the family's future good. Proprietorial families display considerable discursive knowledge about the economic value and advantage pertaining to Vietnamese kin ideology. They also value the autonomy the restaurant provides, describing it as a place where "things can be done the Vietnamese way". And it is because of the latter, I suggest that the restaurants play a key role in the reproduction of Vietnamese social capital.

The Vietnamese created and ordered restaurant provides a significant opportunity
for the young to recognize themselves as mutually interdependent members of a household which achieves much of its corporate existence from the business and common budget. At work, and at celebrations where respect for the ancestors and filial piety are brought to the fore, the young are subsumed into the larger entity under the tutelage of those more senior. These celebrations are a necessary part of protecting prosperity and are therefore intrinsic to the daily work of making a living. At the same time they are also investments in custom, and hence are integral to the social reproduction of Vietnamese ethnic identity.

Moreover Vietnamese extend the basic principles underlying family relationships to relations with the wider Vietnamese society. Hence it is through practical activity undertaken as a member of a kin group that the Vietnamese also come to "know" themselves as a certain sort of people who organise themselves according to hierarchies of authority and moral obligation that order personal and communal relations. These stand in opposition to social relations of contractual Australian society that are predicated on an egalitarian philosophy and entail significant elements of individual choice.

In the nha, by way of contrast, the authority of senior members remains undiminished while the business remains small and tied to provisioning a single family. Rather than face the challenging presence of other senior members, or confront the crisis of incorporating outsiders into positions of management, Vietnamese businesses (today and previously in Vietnam) typically segment. To the economist's way of thinking this may be detrimental to growth and economic performance. But by failing to transform into another mode, the structure continues to reproduce the hierarchies of power and obligation that mesh the superordinate and subordinate. Thus the systems of classification at work in the restaurant regenerate divisions by age, sex and position in the relations of production. These classifications contribute to the reproduction of the power relations of which they are the product, and help secure the misrecognition of the arbitrariness on which such classifications are based.

And, as Bourdieu [1977] points out, it is in the interest of certain groups that this be so. Restauranteurs are able to pursue economic ends not in terms of the autocratic actions of those in a position to impose their will, but rather in the manner of living up to standards or meeting convention. Such is the Vietnamese father who, capitalizing on the labour of his wife and children, demonstrates that he is a "good provider". These standards and conventions together with the prestations and counter-prestations of trust, confidence, and gratitude which pass between Vietnamese parents and children as they work side by side, camouflage while they sustain "a gentle, hidden exploitation" (Bourdieu 1977-192).
Conclusion

As the unit of reproduction and replenisher of Vietnamese human and social capital the nha is the essential basis of Vietnamese ethnic identity. Family labour organised around the production of food mediates the construction of Vietnamese identity and in doing so reproduces "traditional" Vietnamese family relations. Cooking, therefore, is an activity vital to the continuity of Vietnamese social existence. And by calling for the protection and retention of the Vietnamese family elders and employers reinforce their own position in a social order based upon differential relations between the ages and allegiances both to the collective and one's particular family. Thus the nha as the unit of production, and through its senior members' role as gatekeeper of Vietnamese ethnic identity, reproduces the moral imperatives encapsulated in flag and family.

I shall argue in the next and concluding chapter that while Vietnamese elders and employers are concerned to transmit certain aspects of Vietnamese ethnic identity unchanged to the next generation, the experiences of younger Vietnamese in the ACT indicate that ethnic identity must in fact be unravelled and reinterpreted anew by each successive generation.
Chapter 5. Continuity and Change

In this chapter I argue that the production and sale of ethnic food has served to empower a property-owning sub-group of an otherwise economically and socially marginalized generation of immigrant Vietnamese. Even so members of this sub-group do not envisage that the next generation will remain in the restaurant trade. Instead parents strive to expand the economic and employment choices open to their children. They also hope that the young will protect and maintain the core elements of Vietnamese ethnic identity, namely flag and family. However, I present evidence that suggests the young are reinterpretting and refashioning a Vietnamese ethnic identity appropriate to themselves in the present, Australian context. In the process a multi-faceted Vietnamese self is emerging. This pluralist self offers an opportunity for the coming generation to participate in, and benefit economically from, both Australian and Vietnamese sectors of Canberra society. I argue that dual participation mediates the contradiction between the ethnic experience and class position of skilled and educated Vietnamese [Jakubowicz 1984-38]. For although the Australian multicultural political discourse heard in recent years purports to welcome and respect cultural variation, the reification of some aspects of minority culture and the denial of others suggest the continuing domination of ethnic minorities in Australia.

But first to Vietnamese parental aspirations and how living up to these both challenges and changes aspects of Vietnamese ethnic identity symbolised in flag and family.

Vietnamese Familial Relations: Continuity and Change

As the migrating generation, many of today’s restauranteurs recognize that the doors they seek to open for their children are closed to themselves. Although “in” Australia, and despite the fact that many have taken up citizenship, they remain Vietnamese to many Australians regardless of their changed legal status. For their part, most Vietnamese restauranteurs live and work predominantly within the confines of their own group; few social or recreational activities are conducted outside the Vietnamese community. Like Greek Cypriot refugees, many Vietnamese believe “it takes a refugee to understand one”, and prefer the company of their
own kind [Loizos 1981-183]. They are "encapsulated" in a network of fellow refugees with whom they feel comfortable [Hannerz 1980-256]. Interactions with Australians are restricted as Barth [1970-16] would say to "sectors of assumed understanding or mutual interest". Certainly limiting contact helps avoid being perceived as a competitor or a burden (see below). "No trouble" and peaceful co-existence are attractive given the ambiguity of their status as refugee migrants, and the Vietnamese desire for advancement.

Nevertheless, the claim (see page 69) that the Vietnamese food business is Vietnamese territory is at once a bind and a privilege: it is a privilege in terms of imposing restricted access on the trade, but a bind for the next generation in that this specialization in "ethnic" food could fix both identity and livelihood, leading in other words to an "ethnic trap" for Vietnamese in Canberra. However the majority of proprietors consider the restaurant as no more than a stepping stone to greater things, if not for themselves then at least in the plans they have for their children.

Vietnamese restauranteurs want the coming generation to achieve a social standing higher than their own, either in more "white collar" types of businesses - perhaps electrical or computing - or as members of one of the professions. To this end parents aim to endow their offspring with the education, funds and skills they lacked on arrival; they plan, in effect, for the next generation to compete in the Australian labour market equipped with resources more in common with middle class Australians. Beyond investing in their children's education, parents also hope to bequeath a stock of capital to them at some time later in life. They talk of saving enough to set children up in a business, and/or leaving them something "to pass to the next generation" [see Appendix Phao and Tien; Mai and Cao].

Of course it makes good sense to invest generously in one's children, thus strengthening bonds of loyalty and obligation which secure one's own consumption in old age and symbolic permanence after death, the latter sustained by the conscientious practice of ancestor worship. As Bourdieu [1977-195] says "giving is a way of possessing", and indeed the desire to accumulate wealth and possessions for servicing relationships is felt keenly by these Vietnamese, previously engaged in capitalist endeavour in Vietnam (see Chapter I). Many "feel safe" only after this has been achieved and the capitalist nexus between people and things, disrupted by the loss of the war and subsequent flight, re-established.

While the lives of the migrating generation's children will no doubt be broader, the aspirations and plans held for them also evoke parental anxiety because they
entail more intensive participation in majority institutions. And greater participation has its dangers. It brings "the undiscussed into discussion, the unformulated into formulation" [Bourdieu 1977-168]. The "givens" of the "natural" world - elements such as filial piety, respect for elders and family loyalty (see Chapter 4) valued as distinctively Vietnamese and essential components of Vietnamese kin ideology - are being brought into question and dispute. For example, during fieldwork I noted that children who master English more easily than their parents were often thrust into interpreting positions, assuming the role of family spokesperson. This is inappropriate, given their youth and subordinate position in the Vietnamese kin group. Their fathers, on the other hand, have frequently faced difficulty finding work. Unemployment and poor English undermine patriarchal authority. Thus re-settlement experiences have implicitly devalued Vietnamese respect for age. Australian television programmes, such as "Perfect Match" (see page 69), also encourage freedoms previously unknown by Vietnamese teenagers and, I suggest, promote values such as individualism and coquettishness which their parents do not countenance. Still younger children question why they must always have Vietnamese food at home. Some say they would like to eat tinned *spaghetti*.

Thus, as many Vietnamese parents see it, "innocence" [Bourdieu 1977-169] is giving way in Australia to the imperfect substitute that "the life here is too free for our people". This phrase reflects the discomfort of a father who is aware that family obligations may not in future be met, and so the flow of advances and returns (see Chapter 1) between the generations break down. It is an oft-repeated parental refrain. In addition, while a community spokesman is confident that every Vietnamese parent in the migrating generation "will teach their children our language and our history", he is aware that resolve may well diminish in the next generation. Some established Vietnamese in Canberra are already reluctant to demonstrate actively political commitment to the homeland's struggle for freedom (see page 52). Moreover it is not just Vietnamese family units who are the poorer. Although values associated with the asymmetrical relations of age and gender and the moral obligation to "continue the struggle for Vietnam's freedom" are learned individually within the family setting, these values also privilege the Vietnamese view of themselves as a certain kind of people. Thus disruption of the family is at the cost of ethnic distinctiveness and community cohesion.

However in the course of my research I did have the opportunity to speak to one Vietnamese advocate of Australian family life. Kim left Vietnam twenty years ago partly to escape her natal family's poverty and lack of opportunity for herself (see Appendix Kim). She has raised her children in "the Australian way". "The free
life is better, you live longer that way" she says. "If they (one's children) stay with you (once they are old enough to be independent) you have to cook for them, clean for them, they all the time bother you, you get sick from that. Better when they grow up they go by themselves". However Kim is well aware that a restaurant requires family labour if it is to prosper. Her teenage children "won't do, won't help. I have to work for all the family", she laments. "I have to pay for everything - no family to do!". Kim has failed to instil in her offspring those asymmetrical relations between parent and child which secure, among other things, continuing access to labour. The economic cost Kim must shoulder because of her commitment to the "free life" is obvious.

Kim, however, is the exception. The contrasting categories of "individualistic Australian" and "duty bound Vietnamese", lifted from their contexts of origin and reified, symbolize two familial lifestyles. These are more than short cuts to express a cluster of attitudes and values. They carry a moral judgement about what "should be", and express the structural opposition of Vietnamese and Australian where the Australian is perceived by many older Vietnamese to be both near and threatening. They have good reason for this. The Vietnamese perception of impending loss has already been remarked upon with regard to the Anglo-Celtic majority's power to contest Vietnamese political ethnic identity, thereby challenging Vietnamese self-determination (see Chapter 2). Further as described in Chapter 3 the relationship of Vietnamese cuisine to Australian popular eating has developed through annexation and incorporation, subject to Australian taste. Needless to say, many Vietnamese parents, like the father cited above, fear the same fate will befall their kin relations. They foresee the erosion of Vietnamese family values and loss of historical rootedness, both of which currently serve to renew the Vietnamese self and the ethnic group.

While older Vietnamese in Canberra continue to couch kin ideology in a perceived traditional idiom that indicates their desire for continuity, some tend to overlook the fact that today relations between parents and children are being forged in a different place and time. Increasingly children will have no clear memory of what it was like to live according to Vietnamese tradition in a predominately Vietnamese society. Furthermore, Vietnamese culture in Australia is far from a replica of the Vietnamese social order their parents remember. Inevitably the lives of migrants - be they Italians in Australia [Huber 1977-19] or diaspora Hausa [Cohen 1969-47] - undergo a "metamorphosis" simply by virtue of the fact that they have moved and settled with others of their kind "who have not recreated a community to receive them like that from which they came" [see Macdonald in Huber 1977-19].
Aware of this the Vietnamese Community Association [29/9/1985] suggests to parents that

"Life in a new country means some changes must be made to the way we celebrate, the way we live and the way we think. Our children's education represents a fusion of two sets of values. Traditionally, the Vietnamese culture emphasises one's duty to one's family ... In their newly adopted country, our children must learn the ways and styles of an urbanized, industrialized society which encourages individualism. The key to successful re-settlement in Australia, for ourselves and our children, lies in the achievement of an appropriate blending of these two sets of values. The way to go is certainly not to hold on to all traditions and avoid change at all costs. Nor is it to grasp at all things new and become hopelessly without a sense of roots and identity. Harmony requires us to select the most fundamental of our traditions and the most practical of new skills and to ensure they are consistent with one another".

While the association's recommendation illustrates both the importance of harmony and synthesis in Vietnamese thinking and the role of education in moulding a multifaceted Vietnamese self there is, as yet, no established role model of what it is to be a Vietnamese-Australian. Rather, the next generation of Vietnamese is still in the process of "finding a voice or style" [Fischer 1986-210] which does not deny the various components and contributions to its identity. For instance, some former students in Canberra (one of whom is described in more detail in the following section) successfully combine individual careers and membership in Australian tennis and squash clubs with Vietnamese family and community life.

Another vivid illustration is a young, Melbourne-based, and upwardly mobile man's commentary on his "two ways of life". The man, Tan Nguyen, says "in my family and dealing with our people, I am Vietnamese .... dealing with clients, Australian friends and government I am Australian .... At the racing track and football field I am Australian" [Time 21/7/1986]. There is evident tension between inward (communal) and outward (contractual) modes of living, between loyalty to his own ethnic group, and with it the preservation of the past, and the necessity of establishing relations with the majority in the present. "Segregativity" [Hannerz 1980-258], the mode of urban existence which comprises participation in several but separate social networks, characterises Tan's life. It will, I suggest increasingly typify the lives of young Vietnamese. More importantly these examples indicate that ethnic identity is not simply passed from generation to generation, but must be re-invented and re-interpreted by each generation in line with the new and changing circumstances which confront them.

Tan, described above, is insisting on a flexible, pluralist ethnic self viable in the
Australian present and future. His experience demonstrates that ethnic identity is not an objective form but can be manipulated to fit the occasion and negotiated to further human interests [see also Barth 1970-23; Cohen 1969-49; Dentan 1976]. Further Tan's multifaceted self is an implicit rejection of various exclusive and unidimensional Australian constructions of Vietnamese as "exotics" (and ethnicity simply the preservation of cultural diversity), a "model" (hardworking, frugal and family-oriented) or "undesirable" (gold smugglers and queue jumpers) minority detailed in Chapter 2. Rather, Tan and some former students are able to invoke the appropriate manners and speak in the idiom suitable to the Australian or Vietnamese place and group. A pluralist self ensures they are not confined to the ethnic enclave of the older generation; instead they participate in, move between and benefit from both the Australian and Vietnamese sectors of Australian society. And, as bearers of the Nam Tien spirit, the Vietnamese have access to a tradition of synthesis, of guarding "what was" while adapting to the "what is" of the changed circumstances.

Class and Ethnicity

The parental aspirations described above are quests for familial social and economic advancement. Refugee status, at least briefly, reduced the majority of Vietnamese now in Canberra to a similar social standing with losses shared in common. However inequality was a fact of life in South Vietnam (see Chapter 1), and today social differentiation is again important. Already there are cleavages within the ethnic category of Vietnamese. Among the entrepreneurs a few are rumoured to be quite wealthy. There are also bilingual professional and administrative personnel, some situated in intermediary jobs "trading in" their ethnicity while furthering private class interests. But many, lacking English, are locked into the ethnic sub-economy which offers little in the way of either security or mobility.

Stratification is accepted by the Vietnamese proprietors who participated in this research as part and parcel of the competitive search for profit and social betterment. The primary concern of each trader is the perpetuation and legitimation of the privileged position of his entrepreneurial family within the Canberra "ethnic trade" despite the rhetoric of ethnic homogeneity and interdependence. Thus economic interests lie behind the deployment of ethnic ideology. The ethnic dialogue disguises the contradictory and potentially conflict-ridden relations between property (employer) and labour (employee). For while entry into the Vietnamese food trade is based on ethnic ascription, and is therefore theoretically open to all Vietnamese, entrepreneurial financial success is in large
measure built on the domination of compatriots and exploitation of subordinate kin (see Chapter 4).

The pre-eminence of ethnicity effectively diverts "attention from the exclusive control of the means of production by a few, rendering the majority dependent" [Sahlins 1981-94]. This certainly seemed to be the case in Canberra where I found petit bourgeois Vietnamese focus on, and justify, the rightful place of the handful of successful families on the grounds that hard work and self-sacrifice are the prerequisites of material success. Failure, on the other hand, is explained in terms of individual limitation or weakness.

As mentioned above, one or two former students have chosen to pursue several occupations at once, to have one foot in the family firm embedded in the local Vietnamese community, and the other in the capitalist wage-labour camp where relations are typically contractual and based on single-stranded interests. Capitalism individualizes work and, consequently, marginalizes the family. It was to counter these forces that one entrepreneur I met bought back into the Vietnamese restaurant trade after being absent for several years. He explained that he felt he had "lost contact" with the Canberra Vietnamese community while working for the Australian government. He therefore acquired a restaurant to "get back in touch" and, although he did not proffer it, other fellow-countrymen suggested to also win recognition and status in compatriot eyes. In effect, he wanted to re-establish the "more varied and complex community ties" that typify small commodity production [Friedmann 1986-47]. This informant's actions have brought him the opportunity to develop his own personal career while also advancing his family's material well-being by utilizing the labour of other family members with fewer skills to sell. Dual participation mediates the contradiction between his ethnic experience and recently acquired Australian class position [Jakubowicz 1984-38]. For although the former students, in particular, may be professional and mobile people, they are nevertheless still "ethnics" and are therefore distanced and stigmatized (see below).

A successful family is a rich family - wealth is more prestigious among Vietnamese in Australia than even education, said one Vietnamese man. Moreover material success advances individual Vietnamese households, and not the community as a whole despite the restaurant trade being grounded in collective tradition and resources. Indeed Vietnamese devotion to the nhà and the latter's social exclusiveness has, I suggest, much to do with the seeming inevitability of segmentation that surrounds Vietnamese business partnerships. It is difficult to find any "cultural guides" or conventional wisdom pertaining to successful
participation; only avoidance is recommended as "contributions can never be equal" and "it is hard to share, family and friends come between partners" [see Appendix Tran].

While "segmentation extends and repeats the structures of the domestic society" [Meillassoux 1981-82], it does so at the expense of community cohesion. Competition and individualism are centrifugal forces which exacerbate the fragmentation of extended familial ties and weaken the wider social fabric. And, unlike the Hausa [Cohen 1969], the Vietnamese in Canberra by and large lack alternative integrating forces such as community-wide religious principles, spatial proximity or even extensive networks of friends which cut across class divisions.

Relations with the Majority: Employment

Thus, manipulated in the interest of exploitation and domination within the local Vietnamese community, ethnicity is as much an economic as a cultural phenomenon: the Australian "free life" and loss of a distinctive Vietnamese identity jeopardize the source of today's livelihood, and therefore represent more than hangovers from the past. Rather their import lies in current Vietnamese circumstances for, as I argue below, when it comes to employment, relations between the majority and minority are characterised by exclusion, alienation and avoidance.

Needless-to-say work skills developed in Vietnam do not always translate into prospective jobs in Australia. Even in large metropolitan areas such as Sydney and Melbourne, Vietnamese say "we cannot find the jobs we want, the jobs we like" [Hawthorne 1982-309]. Vietnamese living in Canberra confront additional employment restrictions, such as residency requirements which make the majority ineligible for positions in the public sector - the major employer - for at least the first few years. Evaluating the Community Refugee Settlement Scheme (see page 19) MSJ Keyes Young [November 1981-81] notes that only about 32% of the programme's Canberra participants had found full time jobs. The report comments "the figures would look even worse if many had not left Canberra to get work". Behind figures such as these lies a personal cost. Vietnamese in Canberra, like their compatriots located in the larger, industrialized cities of Australia's eastern seaboard [Hawthorne 1982-298], describe feeling ashamed and insecure about their inability to find work and/or demotion to blue-collar standing.

Possessing qualifications is no guarantee of an easier entry into Australian society [Collins 1984-21]. Cox [1983(a)-339] points out qualified (Indochinese) refugees enter a labour market where their skills are in over-supply. "The choice is then
between being demoted .... or being enabled to compete with the native born with the risk of their presence being resented. Australia, to date and on balance, has favoured the first alternative". Little wonder a restauranter who originated from an educated and upper middle-class South Vietnamese family commented rather bitterly "the restaurant is not suitable for the background of our [his and his wife's] families". Both he and his wife have tertiary qualifications, which supposedly have agreed upon local value in Australia, except perhaps when the possessor is perceived as a newcomer, competitor or ethnic.

Some, such as Tran and Bich described in Chapter 4, hope the purchase of a restaurant will be the solution to the family's unemployment problems. They aim to make their ethnicity work for them, rather than having it work against them in other employment, a common enough migrant experience. Collins [1984-21], for instance, comments that "if we look to migrants' work experience the evidence is clear that non-Anglophones work in the worst conditions and the hardest and most repetitive jobs". Although property gives independence relative to wage employment, it also makes considerable demands on the energy and standard of living of every \textit{nha} member. Family consumption, leisure and domestic responsibilities must all bow to the enterprise's requirements (see Chapter 4). And the struggle entailed in getting established should not be minimized. I heard many entrepreneurs in Canberra complain of intense competition for customers. They believe the local market is already saturated with Vietnamese restaurants and yet, to their dismay, still more are opening! Nonetheless restaurant ownership holds ideological appeal to Vietnamese parents feeling estranged in Australia's commodified society. The productive family (grounded in property and hierarchical relations) promises the continuation of social relations predicated on respect and generosity, and possibly improvement in the \textit{nha}'s class position. Thus working "for the family", in contrast to factory work, is perceived as non-alienated work. And, without a doubt, the proprietorial family's newly won status stands in sharp contrast to the majority of Vietnamese refugees who are either unemployed or have ended up in unskilled or semi-skilled jobs (see Introduction).

In Chapter 3 I described how entrepreneurs articulate market protection using the language of Vietnamese ethnic exclusiveness. They point out that Australians are not accredited members of the relevant ethnic category, and therefore scoff at suggestions of majority participation in their food trade. Confrontation with the majority is therefore avoided partially because Australians are "unfit" for work in "ethnic" businesses. While this differentiation is important for the Vietnamese as a means of delineating a market niche and ensuring a cheap labour supply, it is viewed as a threat by some Australians. During fieldwork I heard the Vietnamese
restauranteurs in Canberra criticized by members of the Anglo-Celtic majority for "taking" carp from Lake Burley Griffin "for free", getting "cheap loans" from compatriots and having an "unfair advantage" over Australians because the Vietnamese family "works for nothing". These comments fail to consider the structural conditions which many Vietnamese in Canberra believe make it necessary for them to rely on community self-employment. Further, all deny the right of Vietnamese to cultural distinctiveness by implying that Vietnamese business practices should be no different from those of the Anglo-Celtic majority. They therefore serve to sustain, without challenge, the superordinate economic position of the majority.

A representative of the local Restauranter's Association, clearly put out by the absence of Vietnamese participation in his organization, believes "they take but don't give. Nor do they stick to local awards or legal requirements". When he calls on Vietnamese restauranteurs to discuss joining the Association "they all claim they don't speak English". Yet both Australian and Vietnamese traders purport to value free enterprise and private ownership, with decision-making legitimately in the hands of the owner. Private initiative, self-help and assistance between closely related kin have historically proved to be the most reliable, if resource poor, avenues of help for Vietnamese [Scott 1976-27]. Nevertheless I heard Australians construe as "unfair competition" business practices Vietnamese consider to be based on self-help and individual initiative.

Even so Vietnamese express reticence about unemployment benefits, seeing them not as something free but as something that incurs a debt requiring recompense at some later date. And having heard much about themselves and what is expected of them in the Australian media, Vietnamese are keenly aware of pressure to "get off" welfare payments and accept the first job available. They know that, like Blainey, many agonize over costs incurred by the Australian tax-payer through increases in the welfare bill presumably brought about by the need to support newcomers [The Age 19/3/84-1]. Neither, as some sections of the majority see it (see Chapter 2), should Vietnamese "take Australian" jobs. Others, such as Australian government representatives, academics and representatives from various non-government organizations, give voice to the importance of the newcomers finding "gainful employment" as the first step towards economic self-sufficiency [see Discussion in Price 1980].

However "gainful employment" can do more than reduce the welfare bill. As a major contributor to "settlement success" employment holds the promise of newcomers incorporating majority values. It is "the key to satisfactory integration"
Conclusion

In this chapter I have shown that while Vietnamese restauranteurs have been able to turn disadvantage to advantage in the market place by giving prominence to aspects of their cultural heritage, their efforts have also been the somewhat precarious attempt to make a living in Canberra where access to other spheres of employment are blocked. Further, these restauranteurs are doing all they can to forestall the next generation repeating their own employment (and unemployment) experiences; they are encouraging their children to aim for upward mobility through gaining entry to a profession or white-collar business.

Forms of employment that are preferred alternatives to running a restaurant are typically neither labour intensive, nor involve technologically simple work. By their very nature, therefore, they are not conducive to the perpetuation of the *nha* as the unit of production. Rather this sort of employment entails the restructuring of the *nha* along Australian nuclear family lines. The Australian family is primarily a unit of consumption and depends financially on wages and salaries earned outside the family. Thus, a major challenge to Vietnamese ethnic identity in Canberra may well come from within rather than from the external, dominant Anglo-Celtic culture; a quiet, internal revolution as individual Vietnamese families restructure according to their own class interests.

Already competition and stratification associated with particularistic class interests divide the Canberra community to the detriment of ethnic distinctiveness and community cohesion. Progressive transformation to a non-familial mode of production threatens the transmission to the next generation of "traditional" Vietnamese values and markers of Vietnamese ethnic identity. Although the migrating generation fear their children will lose or abandon their heritage, I have argued here that a multifaceted Vietnamese ethnic self is emerging among the young and well-heeled; a re-crafted self which accommodates both Vietnamese and Australian contributions to Vietnamese identity. This pluralist self facilitates participation in both the Vietnamese and Australian sectors of Canberra society. Dual participation allows the advancement of individual class aspirations and the retention of Vietnamese distinctiveness, and thereby avoids cultural incorporation by the majority.
Postscript

The majority of Vietnamese living in Canberra entered Australia during the 1970's and 1980's, decades also marked by the political embrace of multiculturalism. Australia came to be popularly referred to as "a land of immigrants", and minority group food won favour as a symbol of the country's recently recognised cultural diversity. Enlarged majority food choices and changing eating habits provided an opportunity for Vietnamese entrepreneurs to carve out an economic niche on the periphery of the Anglo-Celtic business sector, thereby creating employment for themselves and their compatriots in an otherwise restricted labour market.

However while Australians now savour ethnic food, finding it "exotic and delightfully cosmopolitan expressive culture" [Kasnitz 1984-167], some members of the Anglo-Celtic majority are less enamoured with the familial mode of its production. Cries of "unfair competition", "cheap loans" and "free labour" sound more like the rhetoric of exclusion than the celebration of diversity or "appreciation of a variety of lifestyles" [Zubrzycki 1982-x]. Indeed in 1982 the Australian Council of Population and Ethnic Affairs saw fit to add a fourth principle to the multicultural masterplan, namely "equal responsibility for, commitment to and participation in society" [1982-121]. The Chairman wrote "minority groups with a non-English speaking background must not flourish on the margin and at the expense of the total Australian society" [1982-x]. This statement spells out in no uncertain terms the view that relations between the minority and the majority are to cultural (and confined to the non-controversial) rather than structural and/or politically loaded. Cultural diversity serves to enrich the nation as a whole - "a multicultural society is interesting and colourful" [1982-16] - whereas structural diversity (and aspects of Vietnamese political culture) are viewed with suspicion as potentially divisive. All of which begs the question of who Australia's multicultural policy benefits and the concept of culture it heralds.

In Chapter 3 Australian preoccupation with Vietnamese ethnic food's status as a "preserved" or pristine cultural product was described. Intrinsic to the majority's venture into "otherness" through consumption is a static notion of culture and
cultural products as old forms brought out for display on contrived occasions, such as ethnic food festivals. Yet to be accepted Vietnamese food had to be “domesticated” and “civilized” to fit the Australian palate. Once converted the new form (presented though as unchanged) has been incorporated into Australian popular eating habits. Muga [1984-2] describes the process of appropriation and conversion thus: "that part of the ethnic sub-culture considered ‘respectable’ is romanticized, stereotyped, seized upon commercially, the rest of the culture is defined out of existence". Adventurous eating, I suggest, reflects the process of cultural incorporation, and as such signals the minority’s subjugation. Food’s aesthetic qualities have been latched on to, and prised from the social structure and associated beliefs and values which underscore its production. Detached fragments now stand for the “whole” Vietnamese cooking heritage. Thus by participating in multiculturalism through eating, the Australian consumer helps construct the ‘culture’ the political ethnic ideology is ostensibly designed to protect.

It is legitimate to question the advantage that has accrued to successive Australian governments by incorporating ethnicity into their political platforms. Jakubowicz [1981-61] argues ethnicity is “the invalidation of class history of ethnic Australia, and the reconstruction of their experience and history in their countries of origin and Australia as totally cultural .... that is the effective outcome of multiculturalism”. He continues "the State has engaged in such a task be it under the terminology of assimilation, integration or multiculturalism". Certainly, as Muga suggests above, the promotion of ethnic ideology has allowed the “emasculating” of minority cultures in the name of their glorification. But further, the presence of restaurants representing cultural diversity through food (see page 11) gives the state an opportunity to appear to recognise the multicultural reality of Australian society [Kakakios and Van Der Velden 1984-162], while simultaneously deflecting challenges to its hegemony. Grassby’s path to “unity through diversity” (see page 8) begins to look more and more like social control; the majority can rest easy, secure in the knowledge that the overriding commitment of all citizens is to the Australian nation.

Herein lies the Vietnamese challenge. The restaurant, as property, reinforces the “traditional” Vietnamese family (nhà) by knitting husband and wife together in terms of mutual interest in the joint venture, and strengthening ties to their children through claims to family resources both now and in the future. Furthermore in the restaurant setting the young inherit Vietnamese ethnic identity through “lived experience” rather than by way of passive instruction received at sterile Saturday morning cultural and linguistic “preservation” classes. It is through participation in practical activity organized around the production of food
that the young come "to know" themselves as family, and by extension as community, members who structure themselves according to hierarchies of authority and moral obligation. These principles underpin both flag and family, key markers of Vietnamese ethnic identity in Canberra. Family labour mediates the construction of these aspects of Vietnamese ethnic identity. Moreover the restaurant contains within itself the seeds of continuity, for in this space the dialectic between man the producer and his product - denied by the "cultural pluralism" that is taken as multiculturalism - is maintained.

Thus the micro-world of the restaurant, quietly existing on the perimeter, is much more than a quaint or harmless example of cultural distinctiveness. It is the institutional expression of the Vietnamese social order and consensual values and beliefs. It represents dynamic cultural practice, creating and recreating meaning to fit new realities but nonetheless continuing to be distinctively Vietnamese. However Vietnamese hopes and plans are for the coming generation to establish themselves through education in professions and white collar businesses. These plans preclude the perpetuation of the nha as the unit of production and consequently contribute to weakening cultural distinctiveness and community cohesion. Thus restructuring according to each Vietnamese family's class interests along Australian, nuclear family lines may well initiate a quiet revolution from within. Already there is evidence that a multi-faceted Vietnamese self is emerging among the young, more educated Vietnamese in Canberra; a self which incorporates both Vietnamese and Australian contributions to Vietnamese ethnic identity in Australia.

A pluralist self may in fact be a necessity if the Vietnamese are to realize the hopes and dreams that brought them to Australia, for given their conspicuous physical appearance, "passing" as a member of the white majority is simply not possible. Cox [1983(a)-342] recognizes this when he writes "we may find Asians spearheading a new form of multicultural development epitomised by ethnic developments that parallel mainstream rather than just facilitating the use of them" (mainstream institutions). However Cox does not go far enough. The Vietnamese, I suggest, have the ability to move beyond Cox's "degree of separate development" and the unidimensional existence government envisages; to operate within several social fields without denying any. Dual participation provides Vietnamese with the opportunity to achieve material and social betterment without having to pay the price demanded by monocultural Australia, namely the abdication of each migrant's heritage.
Appendix

Tran and Bich

Tran, Bich and their eight children came to Australia from a village (2,000 inhabitants approx) on the Camau Peninsula, that area known as "the sponge" where land and water merge at the southern-most point of Vietnam. The region is noted for its mangrove forests, monsoons and sparse population. Transportation was by sampan along water courses as roads and cars were almost nonexistent. Most villagers depended on fishing and farming for their livelihood. Thus all shared a similar lifestyle, although differentiation in terms of wealth was certainly obvious. This was a community where, according to Tran, everybody knew everybody else at least by sight. He was personally related to a large proportion of the inhabitants. "We all share an ancestor" he says, but he cannot trace the exact linkage. Tran recalls little in or out migration from the village during his childhood.

Tran and his wife, now in their mid-forties, originate from families of similar social circumstances. Tran’s father was well-off; he was a fisherman and a landowner. He owned an off-shore fishing vessel and nets. He hired labour to man the boat, paying off the workers after the catch was sold. At fifteen Tran left school and his father took him aboard. Tran recalls that every man in the crew hoped one day to own his own boat. Forming a partnership was one way to get started but, in the long run, "it is hard to share, and friends and family problems come between partners". Tran’s father also had twenty hectares (approx 50 acres) of land where banana and coconut palms, needing little attention, thrived. Sugar cane was also planted by groups of friends on a reciprocal basis. Cane cutting, however, was contracted out. The family grew vegetables, ginger and some spices for their own consumption. Rice was always purchased. Tran’s mother ran a general store from the house, one of the few in the vicinity. When Tran and his only sibling, a brother, began earning they passed their wages to their mother who used the money to cover household expenses and put any surplus towards acquiring more land.

Bich’s family also depended on fishing. Bich, an only child, was ten years old
when her mother died. Her father subsequently remarried and Bich has a brother by this union. Bich married Tran when she was sixteen - she knew Tran slightly and the match was negotiated by one of her male relatives. The wedding took place over three days, culminating in a feast for three hundred people provided by Tran’s family. The food was prepared by Tran’s female relatives and the celebration held at the groom’s natal home. Bich’s family provided the newly-weds with linen and, as was customary in the area, guests gave gifts of cash. The couple lived with Tran’s parents for the next ten years. For a considerable part of that time, Tran worked as a government official in the provincial capital. Tran preferred that his wife and children remained in the village while he was away. He believed the village to be “a safer place than the city” because the former “was closer to the ancestors”.

When Tran returned permanently in 1965 the family moved to a home of their own. Tran’s parents assisted them financially to set up a store in the front room where everything from soap to rice, biscuits, sweets, matches, soft drinks, cigarettes, lamps, pots and pans were sold. The goods were brought in from either Camau (the provincial capital) or Namcan (the nearest large town). Tran worked from the shop as a village health worker. The local doctor sent patients to him with an authorization to receive pills or western-style injections. In addition the family provided herbal remedies for a variety of ailments such as stomach aches, eye problems, fevers and headaches. They also kept a few jars of Chinese tiger balm on the shelves. The family describe themselves as “very rich” between 1965 and 1970.

The village had, as Tran and Bich remember it, a real feeling of community until the mid 1960’s. Men hunted game together in the surrounding forests, returning with wild pigs or monkeys. Friends were invited to share the food. Tran recalls the companionship these feasts engendered translating into practical help between villagers in times of need. The children also remember expeditions into the forest to collect snails, lizards, wild fruits and herbs, and trips to the nearby seashore to gather shellfish.

This perhaps romanticized state of affairs - where “people shared each other’s joys and sorrows” - was not to last. By 1975 money had no value, jobs were hard to find and the communists were appropriating the land. For some time teachers had refused to work in the local school as Vietnam’s southern most provinces were hit hard by a Viet Cong activity. Schools had been burned and teachers kidnapped. Already some of Tran and Bich’s children had missed crucial years of education. The future did not look promising and so all but the eldest,
married daughter decided to leave. They took to the sea in a ten metre boat with thirty five other people, twenty three of whom were relatives. Tran’s aged mother decided not to leave, preferring instead to stay behind and take care of her husband’s grave and the five shrines (including those of her parents) on the family altar.

Tran was an invaluable passenger on the boat for he could navigate by the stars. The group made its way to Bidong Island. Subsequently Tran’s family came to Australia, sponsored by his brother (now a restauranteur in Perth). They arrived in 1982, and today voice their gratitude to Tran’s brother for his assistance because they know families as large as their own are not looked upon favourably by the Australian Immigration authorities. In turn, Tran and Bich arranged to sponsor sixteen other relatives - six adults and ten children - who arrived in Canberra in late 1986.

Tran’s family were not practising Buddhists in Vietnam. The nearest pagoda was a considerable distance from the village and they never visited it. But on Bidong, Tran and Bich and the smaller children became Baptists and, today, occasionally attend the local Baptist church in Canberra. Yet the family also continues the rites associated with ancestor worship.

Although Tran and Bich’s Canberra house is not large enough to accommodate an altar, they nevertheless mark the anniversary of the death of Tran’s father, paternal grandparents and Bich’s parents. When Tran’s father died in Vietnam in 1978 about three hundred villagers attended the funeral. Relatives tied their heads with white cloth, decorated the family altar and gathered to share a meal. While I was conducting my research, between thirty and forty relatives and friends - a number from interstate - joined Tran’s family in marking his father’s death. The nha’s women made traditional triangular rice and mung bean flour cakes and prepared a special meal. Candles were placed on the table on either side of a photo of the deceased. Ben (an elder daughter) related that over the food Tran’s father was remembered, talked about and a few tears shed. She says these celebrations help to dispel tensions and divisions which inevitably plague the living, as the day acts as a reminder of the one society of the living and the dead, and each person’s future as an ancestor spirit.

Hung and Thu

Hung, known and respected throughout the Canberra Vietnamese community as an altruistic and kind man, is the brother of Senh, a former Colombo Plan student and member of the student group who began the first Vietnamese restaurant in
Canberra. Hung is the fifth of seven children, the son of a primary school teacher who lived and worked in a village fifteen kilometres out of Bien Hoa. The family spoke Vietnamese, and maintained a family altar. But, although professing to be Buddhist, they rarely went to the pagoda. Three older, orphaned cousins (the children of one of Hung’s father’s siblings) also lived in the house. Hung’s father had accepted the responsibility for raising and educating them, and in due course he found them all jobs in a tailor’s shop.

Hung’s father’s salary was supplemented by income from a grapefruit orchard. The family - with help from hired labour - tended three hundred trees. They sold the crop to a middleman who came out from Bien Hoa. Hung says that they were “specialists” in grapefruit and it was generally agreed that theirs were “the tastiest in the district”. They also raised poultry and grew vegetables, primarily for domestic consumption.

When Hung was seven years old his father died. Two years later the family moved into a hut attached to his mother’s sister’s house in Bien Hoa. Bien Hoa was more secure than the village which was troubled by Viet Minh activity. In Bien Hoa, Hung’s mother peddled fruit, vegetables and home-made rice cakes to support herself and her children. Hung and Senh sold newspapers on the street to raise some extra cash. Hung attended the local primary school and then went to Saigon to take his baccalaureat. He lived with his mother’s cousin in Saigon, and his board and educational expenses were paid by an elder brother who was an army officer. After graduating he took further vocational training in epidemiology, which subsequently secured him a job as a field officer with the World Health Malaria Eradication Programme. Although based in the capital, the job involved travelling for days at a time around Saigon and into the Delta countryside. The escalation of the war brought mounting attacks on Programme personnel, so Hung decided to join an administrative branch of the police in preference to being sent into the army, where he would have had little leave and no control over where he would be posted. Service with the police at least kept him closer to home.

During this period Hung married Thu, the eldest child of rich parents. Thu’s father, Phat, had originally come from Ben Tre Province, a windy but fertile delta area where the landscape was dominated by coconut plantations and rice fields. At the age of eighteen, Phat went to Saigon to work as an accountant in an uncle’s business. There he met and later married a girl from Bien Hoa. Some generations earlier Phat’s family had migrated from China - Thu cannot identify which relative, or when, the move was made. Although unable to write in Chinese caligraphy Phat had mastered a Chinese dialect which he “used to do business”.
Vietnamese, however, was the language of the home and Thu is unable either to read or speak Chinese. As Phat was a Roman Catholic the six children were raised in the faith. Thu's mother was a Buddhist. The family also observed the rituals of ancestor worship.

Phat moved to Bien Hoa with his wife and went into partnership with his wife's brother. Together they built a brick factory. However as soon as he was financially able to do so, Phat struck out on his own, again into brick manufacturing. Thu recalls neither disagreement nor animosity precipitating this action; it was simply that partnerships are best avoided wherever possible. If this is impossible then it is better to part "while the feeling is still good between them (the partners)". Phat's factory employed between sixty and seventy people. Meanwhile Thu's mother set up a "mini Paul's Home Improvement Centre" (as Thu likened it) selling cement, nails, timber, paint, and everything else needed to build houses, in the ground floor of their two-storey house. She employed several people - a driver, a casual shop assistant and a girl to do the paperwork - none of whom were relatives.

Thu attended the local primary school and then a private Catholic secondary school where French was taught as the second language. However her younger siblings were all sent as boarders to elite private schools in Saigon where French was the language of all instruction. Later Thu's brothers went to university in Paris. Following her secondary schooling Thu was expected to stay home rather than seek employment. She occupied herself by helping with the paperwork generated by her mother's business and by taking French cooking lessons which concentrated on "cakes and pastries".

Thu's marriage to Hung was made on the basis of "free choice". They had a "general western (civil) wedding". The couple exchanged rings in front of the family altar, and Hung's older male kin introduced Thu to the ancestors. A "Chinese" banquet at a local restaurant followed. Hung's family paid for this feast while Thu's parents presented the couple with a brick and tile home located some five hundred metres from their own. Thu lived there while Hung continued to commute between his job in Saigon and Bien Hoa on the weekends. Thu explained that, while there was no obligation to provide a dowry, the bride's parents would probably make a present of money, land or a business to the newly weds if they were well off. And sometimes if a girl's parents were rich, and if they loved their daughter and did not want to lose her, they would accept a poorer man as a son-in-law on the understanding that the couple live close to them. These conditions would be settled well before the wedding; if agreement could not be reached, the marriage would not proceed.
With the communist takeover, Phat’s factory was nationalized. In 1978, Thu’s parents and younger siblings fled the country. They were picked up by a Norwegian boat and now live in Oslo. On hearing of their safe arrival in the West, Hung and Thu decided to leave also, fleeing by boat to Malaysia. They were sponsored from there by Hung’s brother Senh, much to the relief of Thu who infinitely preferred the thought of a future in a restaurant where her cooking skills could be utilized than life in an Oslo factory! Thu and Hung’s arrival in Australia in 1979 coincided with the opening of Senh’s new suburban restaurant. Hung started work on his second day in Canberra and so can boast of never having depended on welfare benefits.

For two years the brothers and their wives worked side by side. Hung painted and panelled the restaurant’s walls with wood while Senh made the bamboo screens that lend a sense of intimacy. Hung thinks that the building may previously have been a bookshop or chemist’s shop because the shelving was so elaborate. However, partly because of inexperience and partly because Senh was short of funds, the site he selected was not ideal. The restaurant, located in a small shopping centre, cannot be seen from the road. Even so, Hung does not envisage moving to a better location because he does not want to repeat the five years of struggle to set up the business and pay off the furniture and equipment.

In the early days both couples had children who were still young and, therefore, largely dependent. But as they grew and as other relatives were expected to arrive in Australia the two families parted company. The restaurant could not provide a good living for two families, let alone soak up the additional labour soon to be available. Hung, Thu and their only child stayed in Canberra, leaving Senh (with 4 children) to move to Sydney and begin his third restaurant in five years. Previously Senh had relied on personal savings and loans from friends to get started, but this time he used his Canberra house as collateral to secure a bank loan. The new restaurant is much larger than its predecessor. It caters for a predominately white Australian clientele and is situated close to a number of offices on Sydney’s North Shore. Senh’s wife proudly points to the number of people her husband has already managed to sponsor; on average one a year since the end of the war. Hung also sees it as a “duty” to help extended kin. “It is our custom to stay together” he says, “it is a way to survive”. He regularly phones relatives in the US and sends money and clothes to others in Vietnam.

Today Thu and Hung share most restaurant tasks and employ one other full time hand to work in the kitchen. Thu only works the lunch shift leaving the evenings to Hung while she minds their son. She usually takes home food for the evening
meal but sometimes gives in to the ten year old’s demand for tinned *spaghetti*. But before breaking for the day she prepares the evening’s desserts and the two or three batches of spring rolls and stuffed chicken wings needed each week. These are fiddly jobs which Hung dislikes - Thu can bone sixty to seventy chicken wings per hour. Nonetheless they both regard this enterprise as far less demanding than a similar project in Vietnam. Here they open only for a few hours at lunchtime and between five and eleven in the evening. Weekends require staying open longer and Hung takes on casuals to meet the demand.

Hung does not imagine he will be able to go much further in Australia himself, but he holds high hopes of his son. He wants the boy to “grow up to be a good citizen and go to university”. Neither this child nor Senh’s children are expected to follow their parent’s into the food trade. To her mother’s satisfaction, Senh’s eldest daughter is already studying pharmacy. This is considered a good job for a girl because it combines the valued attributes of scientific orientation with clean and light physical work.

Hung and Thu do not attend Pagoda or community functions, nor is their son sent to Vietnamese language classes ostensibly because “it might confuse him” while he is learning English. Yet Hung always responds to requests for money or help from these quarters. Indeed he is noted for his generosity. During my fieldwork, he made loans to other Vietnamese, contributed to community functions and was one of the first to offer help when another restaurant was burgled. The couple are also one of the handful of Vietnamese who belong to the Friends of Refugees Group. But Hung is also adept at combining his charitable and business interests. He has offered his restaurant as the venue for a fund raising night for the Blind Society - half the price of a ticket to the charity and half to the restaurant. A similar event in aid of the local school was a great success.

**Kim**

Kim is a rather blowzy, bejewelled, proprietress whose conversation is dotted with information and advice about prices. She grew up in My Tho, a large provincial town in the Mekong Delta. She remembers how drab her thatch and timber home seemed in comparison to some of the French-built houses in the area. She would have liked to have lived in one of those! Instead her father, a local government official, died when she was eight years old. During his three year illness he was unable to work and consequently the family ran through its savings. Kim went to a Roman Catholic primary school “for the poor” although the family belonged to the Buddhist faith. She left school when she was eleven and then moped around the house with little to do. Her future seemed bleak - she had little education or money and no steady job.
Her mother, a petty trader, went daily to the local market place to buy in bulk whatever goods were in demand. She returned to the neighbourhood and sold them in small lots on the street. She rarely transformed the goods by cooking or adding a handicraft skill, preferring simply to buy and resell. Sometimes she was lucky enough to get an order from a local firm for a whole consignment of goods. Kim occasionally found casual work making clay bricks for a nearby brick works. She carried them in baskets hanging from a wooden yoke slung across her shoulders, and was paid by the hundred. As the house was surrounded by fruit trees - mangoes, coconuts and mandarins - Kim sometimes collected and sold the fruit. However the family did not grow vegetables because of the lack of good water. Her mother considered it just as economic to buy their requirements as pay a water carrier.

During these difficult years Kim felt like the son of the family. Her younger brother was too small to contribute to the domestic budget and her sisters "too lazy". Kim is critical of these two sisters who are "still poor because they are not clever". In a more philosophical moment she noted that "some build a good life; some build a hard one". Yet things had not always been so unpromising for this family. Although Kim does not remember her father's parents - they died before Kim was born - she heard that they had "plenty money". Her father's father reputedly spoke French and had some gold, while his wife was a respected midwife.

When Kim was fifteen years old she went to Saigon, 70-odd kilometres away, to stay with her mother's sister who had a job there as a home help. The aunt took care of Kim until she secured a position as a child minder and general help. She "lived in" and when her employer was posted to Canberra in the early 1960's Kim accompanied the family. As soon as she arrived in Australia she knew she would never go back - there was nothing for her in Vietnam but "to be poor". She married a Chinese with Australian resident status before her boss returned home.

Kim is quick to point out that she is a migrant not a refugee. "I can go back anytime I like" she says, but has yet to take advantage of this. Perhaps, she muses, when she's saved up the fare and before her mother dies she will visit Vietnam. She admits to being a bad letter writer. However she feels certain her mother and sisters will let her know if they need anything or are in trouble - "anything wrong they will ask me" she commented with some disdain. Indeed her nephew's recent escape from Vietnam brought letters from Kim's sister (the boy's mother) asking that Kim arrange sponsorship for him from Bidong Island. Kim duly undertook to do this and today employ's the young man at the restaurant.
Kim’s Cantonese speaking husband Lee grew up in New Guinea where his father had a business. Lee did not wish to return to China after liberation and so, with the help of the brotherhood made his way to Australia in the 1950’s. Once married Kim worked with her husband and together they bought and sold a number of Chinese restaurants in Canberra during the late 1960’s and 1970’s. When Vietnamese food became popular in Canberra towards the end of the 1970’s Kim decided to cash in on the trend. She bought the former students’ lucrative business in 1981, but to her dismay returns have gone steadily downhill ever since. Today Kim is “stuck”, unable to find anyone interested in buying her out despite letting it be known among her Vietnamese contacts that she wants to quit. She laments her position thus: “I’m so sad for no money, upset inside, no money to keep me happy but I have to keep going”. She reiterates that she has changed nothing since taking over and so is at a loss to explain her bad fortune. However she faces stiff competition from “the small one”, the other Vietnamese restaurant in the same shopping centre. Kim is well informed about her competitor; she talks confidently of their rent, leasing arrangements, seating turnover and although unhappy about their presence is prepared to walk down for a chat in the pre-dinner quiet.

Kim and her nephew are the only two full-time staff. Others are put on casually as needed. Kim is “out front”, the manageress who deals with customers and the external world in general. She is the only person permitted to touch the till. She also does the cleaning and vacuuming, but is too tired to do the laundry; she keeps linen to a minimum by investing in plastic wherever possible. As she dislikes cooking, Kim leaves that side of things to her nephew and, before his arrival in 1983, to Cao (see Mai and Cao). The nephew, who lives separately in his own flat, is paid wages (part of which he sends to his mother in Vietnam) and to Kim’s way of thinking eats too much and too frequently at her expense. Moreover he is now asking for a wage rise!

Kim excludes her husband from the restaurant; being Chinese “he wouldn’t know what to do in a Vietnamese restaurant”. Yet she recognises that she cannot dispense with familial labour. “I have to pay for everything, no family to do. I even have to pay for them (the staff) to eat”, she says. She does not allocate herself a regular wage; she simply takes what she needs from the till to cover her shopping expeditions. In the evenings her husband collects “take-away” and feeds the rest of the family at home. She has four teenage children, all born in Australia, which, Kim says, is why they “won’t help, won’t do”, leaving her “to work for all the family”. Should Kim insist that the children help, they behave “as if they were boss”, refusing to take orders and making trouble with other staff.
"Customers feel the tension", which is bad for business. Despite this, Kim is a supporter of the Australian "free life". She believes "the free life is better; you live longer that way - if they (the children) stay with you, you have to cook for them, clean for them, they all the time bother you, you get sick from that. Better when they grow up they go by themselves".

Kim belongs to no Vietnamese community group, nor does she attend their functions; "I'm just on my own" she says. When requested, she donates cash to local Vietnamese organizations but has "no time" to do more than this. She sums up her attitude to her fellow countrymen in Canberra thus: "I know people but I'm not friends with them, I just employ them". Yet the Vietnamese community remains an important reference group from her. She actively seeks out information about other Vietnamese and their activities. For instance during our contact she "journeyed across town" to a Vietnamese owned supermarket to find out the price paid at a recent restaurant sale. She returned in a disgruntled frame of mind saying she didn't trust the figures she'd been quoted, she felt they were too high. She also wondered why she'd been given so many details. Perhaps her informant was boasting of his success! Moreover she questioned how "a refugee" could get that sort of money. Her only explanation was perhaps the man had Chinese origins and/or connections.

Phao and Tien

Phao was born in 1941 in a village near Quang Ngai some three hundred kilometres south of Danang on the Central Vietnamese coast. These Lowlands have been cultivated for centuries; small holdings predominate and rarely exceed five acres in size. Residents of the region are noted for being actively, and devoutly, Buddhist.

Phao grew up in "a real peasant family" and relates with pride his rise in social station over the years. His childhood home was constructed of wood, bamboo and thatch. The domestic group consisted of Phao's parents, his father's younger brother, himself and his two brothers. Phao's father had inherited some land about one kilometre out of town. The plot was small, amounting to only about a hectare (2.5 acres), and was worked by Phao's parents and the children who attended the local primary school only in the mornings. The family grew two crops of rice annually, irrigating their land manually using the basket and scoop method. Sometimes there were problems with brackish water as the land was close to the coast line. Ploughing and threshing were done by the team of two buffaloes the family owned. These were sometimes rented out to other farmers when the planting or harvesting seasons were at their height. But wherever
possible the established practice was for the means of production, however simple, to be independently owned. Planting was done on a co-operative basis with other farmers. Two meals a day were provided by the family whose land was being worked. Phao's family also grew vegetables - beans, cabbage, tomatoes and bitter melon - and collected bananas and coconuts primarily for home consumption. However any excess found its way to the nearby town where its sale added to the family's cash income. They had some poultry and pigs and, when not required for work in the fields, Phao liked to fish in the irrigation canals.

Phao's uncle did not work the land with his brother and sister in law. He had a job fixing bicycles and carts in a local shop. He gave the larger part of his wage to Phao's mother, who was in charge of household expenses. He also sparked Phao's interest in mechanics. At the end of primary school Phao went south as there was no chance "to learn about motors in the village". His father arranged for him to board with a relative in Saigon. Phao's willingness to move in search of further education paid off handsomely in the years that followed.

Phao is married to Tien who was raised in Bien Hoa, a large town situated in the Dong Nai valley, some twenty kilometres north of Saigon. Unlike Phao, Tien comes from a large family and grew up surrounded by many relatives who lived and worked in close proximity. Tien's father, the eldest of six children, ran a garage servicing trucks, cars, carts and motorcycles and employed about half a dozen people. He also had a spare parts shop adjacent to the garage. All his siblings had stayed in the same locality, even after marriage. Together with their respective spouses, they invested in a variety of small family-based businesses, in particular tailoring shops, restaurants and garages. Tien recalls the rows of semi-detached, single storey brick homes that were typical of the area. Her family's home opened onto the same street as the garage and spare parts shop. Each house had its own kitchen and sleeping quarters, and the women cooked only for their husbands and children.

Tien attended the local government school until she was twelve. After that her parents decided she should stay at home and help her mother with her eight younger siblings. She was also sent to help at her father's sister's restaurant. The restaurant needed a lot of labour for all the cutting, shredding and washing up. These tasks were considered the work of woman and children. Neighbours were also sometimes employed on a casual basis. Recompense for non-relatives was in the form of cash. Official dealings, or the "out front" work, were left to her uncle although Tien remembers him serving tables when it was busy. She also recalls him accompanying his wife to the market and helping carry her baskets.
Purchases however were left to his wife who made most of the day-to-day management decisions.

Phao met Tien when he called at her father's garage on business. Her father's youngest sister acted as go-between; the match met with approval from Tien's parents who saw Phao as a "hardworking and clean young man". By the time Phao married he was established in the transport business and the couple moved to a village mid-way between Bien Hoa and Saigon. Phao then began to move his natal family south. First he found his elder brother a job in the transport industry. Next he funded his younger brother's education in Saigon. Finally, his parents arrived. Phao and Tien then moved back to Bien Hoa to set up a restaurant at the instigation of Tien's restaurant-owning aunt and her husband. The province's urban population had increased dramatically in the 1960's following the completion of the highway linking Bien Hoa and Saigon in 1961 and the establishment of the Bien Hoa Industrial complex in 1963 and an Air Force close by. Bien Hoa with its two forested mountains and scenic river attracted many day trippers from Saigon. The new restaurant catered to the same clientele as the one in which Tien had worked previously - soldiers and Vietnamese tourists - and could seat around 100. House specialities reflected the natural setting provided by Dong Nai valley; "wild boar, wild deer and food from the forest" recalled Phao, all "grilled over hot coals". Mudfish cooked on skewers, deep fried tropical frog, and eel steamed with spices were also served. In addition, "all the vegetables were fresh, no cans!".

At about the time of their second child's birth, Phao and Tien left Phao's parents in charge of the restaurant and moved to Saigon where Phao won a contract to supply the Americans with sand, gravel and stone. They were well off by this time and able to enjoy some of the real luxuries available in South Vietnam at the time. For example, they became "Vietnamese tourists" themselves. Phao owned a car and the family could afford to go to the beach resort of Vung Tau and the cooler, hill retreat at Dalat. These excursions were made as a nuclear family; it was only very rarely that any one else was invited to accompany them. Moreover there was no need for Tien to work. "Family life is very different here", says Phao. Whereas women such as Tien could "stay home and look after the house if they wanted to, here they have to work in factories".

Phao and Tien decided to leave Vietnam for, as they saw it, the communists had "turned the world upside down". Children spied on parents and everyone's whereabouts were noted by the authorities. The family arrived in Sydney in 1979 and, unlike many who came after them, spent six months in a Sydney migrant
hostel while learning English. They were one of the first Vietnamese to come to Canberra under the Community Refugee Settlement Scheme. A Roman Catholic resettlement group arranged accommodation for them, and Phao and Tien found casual work in a compatriot's restaurant.

Phao and Tien's restaurant had been open for about one year when I was conducting my research. It had been an hectic period for the family, particularly Tien who spent any spare moments catching up on sleep. However the restaurant's success was a frequent comment among Vietnamese. At the time it was the only service in Canberra specifically catering for the local Vietnamese market (see Phao's "Special Viet Breaky" described in Chapter 3). Phoa, a devout Buddhist, burns incense, kowtows and offers food and prayers in front of the restaurant shrines every evening just before the doors are opened to the public. One shrine is for the ancestors, the other incorporates a porcelain Buddha. And the family continues to mark the deaths of the ancestors with a special meal although "the cooking is kept simple" and fewer guests invited. "People are too busy here", says Phao; they have "no time" to make elaborate preparations. Nevertheless some gesture must be made because each nhà's wellbeing and prosperity depends on appropriate behaviour and attitudes being shown to its own unique set of ancestors.

Phao and Tien are very proud of the scholastic success of their children, especially the eldest son Nam. Indeed, Nam's latest school report indicates they have every reason to be pleased; no absenteeism, "excellent attitude and conduct", and near the top of the class in all subjects including English. Nam hopes to enrol in either medicine or architecture, while his parents plan that he will set up a "firm to be passed from generation to generation".

Mai and Cao

Mai is a quietly spoken young woman who likes to wear jade which she says is a "favorite of real ladies". Mai comes from Bihn Duong Province, an agricultural region due north of Saigon. The province suffered extensive war damage because of its strategic position. Details of Mai's early life are rather unclear. She moved frequently between households after her father's death (she was about eight at the time); her home was rocketed a year later and her mother subsequently remarried. These disruptions meant Mai and her sister (the only children of her mother's first marriage) often stayed with their maternal grandmother for long periods at a time. When Mai was fourteen she moved to her paternal grandfather's home in the provincial centre. He supported her through her last few years of schooling and a six month book-keeping course. She then found work as a cashier in a local firm where she met Cao.
Cao grew up in a large two-storey brick house near the business section of town. He lived with his parents, paternal grandmother and eleven siblings. When an elder brother was killed in 1972, his widow and her two children joined the family. Cao's father did not own land; he worked as a middleman in the sugar-cane industry, employing about one hundred people, most of whom were sent out to sugar farms at harvest time. Their job was to buy the crop and then cut and transport it to one of the many small mills which dotted Bihn Duong province. Cao's mother had a fish stall at the local market. Each morning she sent various of her elder children to the wharf to buy some of the catch and bring it to her stall. Two elder sisters tended the mixed store their mother had established in the front of the house some years earlier.

Cao went to the government school until 1973 when he took up an apprenticeship in an uncle's barber shop. While there he learned to type and subsequently managed to secure an office job but, within a year - following the communist takeover - he found himself a worker on the factory floor. By this time Cao was a frequent guest at meals in Mai's home. His father directly approached Mai's mother about their marriage - there was no need for a go-between as Mai and Cao were well acquainted. After the wedding, Mai and Cao continued to live in their respective work dormitories and to eat with their work groups. They rarely saw each other or their families during the week, meeting only on Saturday to spend the evening with Cao's parents and going to visit Mai's mother the next day.

Cao reports wanting to leave Vietnam more urgently than Mai. He disliked the evening indoctrination sessions, the constant propaganda broadcast over loud speakers and regimented lifestyle at his workplace. In January 1979 they boarded the Cuu Long 125 with one hundred others. The boat spent two months circling countries in South East Asia, being supplied with food and fuel but being refused permission to land. Finally, they made it to shore in Indonesia, doused the vessel with petrol, and set it alight. Mai and Cao were accepted by Australia as part of the refugee intake quota and eventually settled in the Blue Mountains under the Community Refugee Settlement Scheme. A house was found for them and work arranged for Cao as a gardener at the local school. However they were desperately lonely and, after three months, decided to head for Melbourne where friends from the Cuu Long 125 now lived. They stopped in Canberra to visit, supposedly briefly, other shipboard friends. They liked the place and, when they found jobs in the restaurant of the (by this time) disintegrating student partnership, they decided to stay. In just over a year the business was sold to Kim. Cao stayed on for three more years, working his way up from dishwasher to kitchen-hand and later
chef. All are jobs tied to the back region. Hence Cao has had little exposure to English. Mai's command of the language is more advanced as she has been employed as a waitress between pregnancies.

Nevertheless, Cao was determined to buy a restaurant as he saw this as "the only way to make a good profit and get ahead". This was achieved in 1984. The previous owners had a "miniature mountain landscape" at the restaurant's entrance. The replica is based on the five elements of geomancy - fire, water, air, wood and earth - in harmonious combination. Mai and Cao retained this, and added a shrine of their own; a plaque inscribed with gold chu nom characters on a red background. Neither Mai nor Cao can read the inscription but they have been told it says "good luck" on one side and "good wishes" on the other. Each evening the electric candles positioned in front of the plaque are switched on, incense sticks burned and fruit offered in the hope the business will prosper. In addition they continue to celebrate ancestor anniversaries (but on a reduced scale) with friends from the journey over. Although Mai is saddened by the smallness of the celebration, she consoles herself with the thought that family back in Vietnam will also be celebrating on that day and tending the ancestor's grave.

Mai and Cao do not open their restaurant at lunchtimes as their suburban location does not warrant it. Rather, they spend the days sewing on a contract basis for a local clothing company. Mai learnt to use a machine at high school and does most of the more intricate work. Cao helps by doing overlocking. Mai is determined her children will grow up to be "good people", "study hard" and have "good jobs". If they are bright she hopes they will enter a profession, if not then a white collar business. She also wants to set up an inheritance for them; perhaps a house or some land.
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