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WHAT'S HAPPENED
TO CABRAMATTA?

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ABSTRACT

Indo-Chinese migration to Australia has a short history beginning with the arrival of the boat people in Darwin in 1975. By June 1984 88,112 Indo-Chinese had been accepted as refugees.

The people who left Indo-China are not a homogenous group, they represent a wide range of backgrounds, skills and resources but they have been drawn together in settling in Australia because of their similarities and their need to help each other through the difficult process of resettlement.

In Sydney a concentrated settlement pattern has been encouraged through direction of refugees to migrant hostels in the Western suburbs. Following the settlement patterns of earlier groups of migrants the Indo-Chinese moved from the migrant hostels into the area around Cabramatta. Cabramatta is located close to Westbridge Migrant Hostel and was also close to the other hostels that have since closed at Cabramatta and East Hills. It also has: a large supply of cheap, rental housing; access to public transport and extensive industrial areas.

Also in common with previous migrant groups the Indo-Chinese soon sought to establish small businesses which could supply the goods and services that they required. The extent of Indo-Chinese business establishment in Cabramatta is, however, exceptional because: the Indo-Chinese community includes a high proportion of ethnic Chinese, a community that has a degree of business acumen; the degree of variation from the host community allows for a wide range of business opportunities.

Prior to the arrival of the Indo-Chinese Cabramatta was a declining centre, its catchment as a neighbourhood centre being steadily eroded by the nearby and larger centres of Fairfield and Liverpool. This stagnation also made the establishment of the first businesses easier with cheap rents and low overheads.

The development of an identifiable Indo-Chinese centre is particularly important to a refugee community who are seeking to establish themselves in an alien environment. Cabramatta now provides a buffer, a place to soften the assimilation process for the Indo-Chinese, where familiar goods, food and faces can be found.

Cabramatta is now a lively, interesting centre. It is a resource which reflects Australia's multi-cultural society and one which could assist the Indo-Chinese community in gaining acceptance. The challenge is now to develop this centre in a way which maintains its vitality and interest, encouraging it to retain its role as a focus of the Indo-Chinese community while also attracting the wider community.

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