

Rethinking Residential Assimilation: The Case of a Chinese Ethnoburb in the San Gabriel Valley, California

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Classic assimilation theories have long stressed the transitory nature of ethnically distinct urban enclaves as springboards for immigrants' eventual integration into the mainstream. New York's Little Italy and Los Angeles' Little Tokyo are well-known examples of residential assimilation, whereby immigrants toiled to enable their children to "melt" into white middle class suburbia and become "indistinguishably" American. In the past three decades, however, this classical inner-city-to-suburbia residential mobility model has been challenged.¹ America's largest metropolitan regions have witnessed trends of suburbanization not simply among native-born non-Hispanic whites but also among native-born and foreign-born racial/ethnic minorities; the latter trend—the direct insertion of large numbers of new immigrants into white middle class suburbs—does not follow the incorporation patterns predicted by classical assimilation theories. Some of the suburban communities that whites once dominated have evolved into "global" neighborhoods in which native-born groups live side by side with native minorities and immigrants of different national origins. Others have rapidly been transformed into "ethnoburbs" by new immigrants possessing higher than

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average levels of education, occupation, and incomes, as well as more expansive social networks that branch out to tap financial resources and markets offshore.²

In this paper, we re-examine new patterns of residential assimilation through the case of a sprawling Chinese ethnoburb in the San Gabriel Valley, California, focusing on the following questions: How have Chinese immigrants of diverse origins and socioeconomic backgrounds negotiated their way into the suburbia of an immigrant gateway metropolis? What is a Chinese ethnoburb like and how does it differ from traditional Chinatowns and from typical American suburban communities? What are the consequences and prospects of this new type of community development and what implications does the ethnoburb phenomenon have for our understanding of assimilation? We base our analysis on the U.S. Census data, data from prior case studies in the existing literature, and our own field observations. Overall, we seek to understand the ways in which contemporary globalization and international migration challenge the notion of assimilation. We also speculate on how new patterns of immigrant settlement create new issues facing the Chinese American community while contributing to our understanding of twenty-first century urban dynamics.

The Changing Contexts of Exit and Reception of International Migration

Global economic restructuring has moved people and capital, leading to sweeping changes in local economies of both sending and receiving countries. In many of the sending countries, global economic restructuring has significantly altered the structures of local economies and opportunities for social mobility, causing people and capital to move within and across national borders in ways that render neoclassical economic theories of international migration inadequate. Wage differentials and access to better employment opportunities are no longer the main forces that push people to move. Other compelling causes include access to formal and informal migration networks, access to well-established institutionalized credit and insurance markets, and the need for risk diversification, as well as extreme hardships arising from war, political and religious persecutions, (de)colonization, and military involvement.³

As a result, the contexts of exit for contemporary international migrations have been substantially reshaped. Since the 1960s,

international migrants to the United States comprise not only “the tired, the poor, and the huddled masses yearning to breathe free,” as is inscribed in the Statue of Liberty, but also the affluent, the highly skilled, and the entrepreneurial. Contemporary immigrants from Asia, for example, include low-skilled urban workers, uneducated peasants, and penniless refugees. They also include highly skilled professionals such as engineers, scientists, physicians, entrepreneurs, and investors.⁴ The influx of large numbers of the latter resource-rich immigrants creates new modes of immigrant settlement, the most remarkable of which being the detour from inner-city ethnic enclaves to white middle class suburbia.

Globalization has also changed the contexts of reception. In the United States, economic restructuring divides urban labor markets into a dominant core sector characterized by knowledge-intensive or capital-intensive jobs that offer high salaries with fringe benefits, good working conditions, ample opportunities for upward social mobility, and a marginal but sizeable sector characterized by low-skilled, labor-intensive jobs that offer minimum wages with no benefits, poor working conditions, and few opportunities for upward social mobility.⁵ The urban employment base of unionized, blue-collar manufacturing jobs that used to facilitate intergenerational mobility for the working-class is shrinking to a trickle. Consequently, the jobs available in local labor markets either require advanced education and skills or do not pay decent wages, and less skilled natives or immigrants living in the inner city are trapped in the ranks of the unemployed or working poor.⁶

Parallel to this economic restructuring is the trend of accelerating suburbanization. Since the 1970s, most of the country’s large metropolises have witnessed “white flight”—the exodus of middle class Americans, mainly whites, leaving the city for the suburbia. In Los Angeles, for example, non-Hispanic whites as a proportion of the metropolitan population declined from over 85 percent in 1960 to 31 percent, less than a third, in 2000. In fact, by the year 2000, most of the country’s major urban centers have become racial-minority-dominant numerically.⁷

The changing contexts of reception have rendered the conventional notion of residential assimilation out-dated. On the one hand, inner-city ethnic enclaves and larger urban contexts in which immigrants first settle may be composed disproportionately of minority natives or immigrants. Due to speedy white

flight, immigrants may have less contact with the native-born middle class whites with whom they are expected to assimilate. They are more likely than in the past to experience varied pathways of segmented assimilation than to follow a linear pathway of assimilation into a single mainstream.⁸ On the other hand, suburbs that used to be exclusively white middle class may now be settled by affluent immigrants who may be perceived by natives as being “unacculturated” because of their visibly non-English speaking and non-white presence.

Changing contexts of exit and reception thus lead to varied modes of immigrant incorporation, which defy conventional notions of straight-line assimilation into the white middle class. In the following section, we unfold the processes and consequences of contemporary Chinese immigration to highlight new forms and mechanisms of immigrant settlement and community development.⁹

Contemporary Chinese Immigration to Los Angeles: Rapid Growth and Diversification

Chinese immigration to the United States began several decades before the mass migration from southern and eastern Europe. But unlike those early European immigrants who were expected to assimilate into the mainstream society as quickly as possible and who have done so in the course of two to three generations, early Chinese immigrants were legally barred from immigration, naturalization, and assimilation by the Chinese Exclusion Act (1882-1943). They were forced to take refuge in Chinatowns, creating their own means of survival via ethnic economies and organizations—to avoid direct competition with native workers while keeping alive their sojourner’s dream that one day they would return to China with gold and glory.¹⁰ Sixty years of legal exclusion confined Chinese immigrants to Chinatowns and prevented them from living elsewhere, hence reinforcing their ethnicity bounded by the enclave as well as the stereotypes of their clannishness and unassimilability.

In the wake of the new millennium, the Chinese American community still remains largely an immigrant community despite its long history of immigrant settlement and its current phenomenal population growth. Between 1960 and 2000, the number of Chinese Americans grew more than ten-fold: from 237,292 in 1960, to 1,645,472 in 1990, and to 2,879,636 (including some 447,051 mixed-race persons) in 2000. As of 2007, the ethnic population reached

3.5 million. Rapid growth is largely attributed to international migration as the first generation comprises the overwhelming majority (nearly 70 percent) and more than three-quarters of the foreign born has arrived in the United States after 1980.¹¹

Unlike the old timers who were uniformly unskilled laborers from the southern region of Guangdong Province, new Chinese immigrants come from diverse origins and socioeconomic backgrounds. The three main sources of Chinese immigration are mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. In recent years, Chinese immigrants from Southeast Asia and the Americas have also been visible. For example, as of 1990, 15 percent of the Chinese American population lived in the Los Angeles metropolitan area. Among L.A.'s Chinese Americans, 23 percent were born in the United States, 27 percent in mainland China, 20 percent in Taiwan, 8 percent in Hong Kong, and 22 percent from other countries around the world as of 1990.¹² Immigrant Chinese from different origins or different regions of the same origin do not necessarily share the same culture or lived experiences. Language is perhaps the most significant cultural barrier, creating a subtle social distance to separate co-ethnics who speak Cantonese or other regional dialects from those who speak Mandarin. The new Chinese immigrants have also been disproportionately drawn from highly educated and professional segments of the sending societies. The 2000 Census showed that young foreign-born Chinese (aged 25 to 34) with four or more years of college education were more than twice as common as young U.S.-born non-Hispanic whites (65 percent vs. 30 percent).¹³

Divergent origins and socioeconomic backgrounds of contemporary Chinese immigrants, combined with global developments in the Pacific Rim region, have drastically changed the Chinese American community from homogeneous Chinatowns into global ethnoburbs.¹⁴ Residential patterns of the Chinese are now characterized by concentration as well as dispersion. Geographical concentration, to some extent, follows a historical pattern: Chinese Americans continue to concentrate in the West and in urban areas. One state, California, by itself, accounts for 40 percent of all Chinese Americans (1.1 million). New York accounts for 16 percent, second only to California, and Hawaii accounts for 6 percent. However, other states that historically received fewer Chinese immigrants have witnessed phenomenal growth, such as Texas, New Jersey, Massachusetts, Illinois, Washington, Florida, Maryland, and Pennsylvania. Among cities with populations over 100,000, New York City (365, 000), San Francisco City (161,000), Los Ange-

les City (74,000), Honolulu City (69,000), and San Jose City (58,000) have the largest numbers of Chinese Americans.

At the local level, traditional Chinatowns continue to exist to receive newcomers and attract economic investments from co-ethnics, but they no longer serve as primary centers of initial settlement as the majority of new immigrants, especially the affluent and highly skilled, are bypassing inner cities to settle into suburbs immediately after arrival. As of 2000, only 3 percent of Chinese in Los Angeles, 8 percent of Chinese in San Francisco, and 14 percent of Chinese in New York lived in old inner-city Chinatowns. However, demographic changes impacted by international migration do not appear to be associated with the disappearance or significant decline of old Chinatowns, which have actually grown and expanded.¹⁵ In New York City's Chinatown, for example, all 10 out of 14 census tracts contained 25 percent or more Chinese, and five of these tracts had a Chinese majority as of 2000. Likewise, all four census tracts in L.A.'s Chinatown contained 25 percent or more Chinese, and two adjacent Census tracts had a Chinese majority.¹⁶

The majority of the Chinese American population is spreading out into the suburbs outside of traditional immigrant gateway cities as well as in new urban centers of Asian settlement across the country. As of 2000, half of all Chinese Americans live in suburbs. There are few new urban Chinatowns in the country where more than half of the residents are co-ethnics. For example, in New York City's Flushing, known as the "second [urban] Chinatown," only two of the eleven census tracts contained 25 percent or more Chinese and none had a Chinese majority. In Los Angeles' Monterey Park, known as "the first suburban Chinatown," ten of the thirteen tracts contained 25 percent or more Chinese but only one tract had a Chinese majority.¹⁷ Small suburban cities in Los Angeles and the San Francisco Bay area have witnessed extraordinarily high proportions of the Chinese Americans in the general population and the emergence of a new and distinct phenomenon—"ethnoburbs."

Monterey Park and Beyond: The Development of a Chinese Ethnoburb in the San Gabriel Valley, California

The notion of ethnoburb was first proposed by the Chinese American geographer Wei Li to refer to the hybridity of inner-city ethnic enclaves and middle class suburbs.¹⁸ According to Li, ethnoburbs are suburban ethnic clusters of people and business-

es. Based on the ethnoburb model, the suburbanization and residential re-concentration of an immigrant group may not necessarily be accompanied by complete assimilation as predicted by the classical theories of assimilation. Instead, this drastic spatial transformation is affected by a combination of global and local forces, including the movements of people and capital and the dynamics of community and networks.

The Demographic Transformation of an American Suburb

The San Gabriel Valley is a vast suburbia to the east of the city of Los Angeles, to the north of the Puente Hills, to the south of the San Gabriel Mountains, and to the west of the Inland Empire, encompassing thirty-one municipalities and fourteen unincorporated communities of Los Angeles County.¹⁹ The Chinese ethnoburb that we describe in the following pages is defined rather loosely to refer to the emerging immigrant Chinese community in the region. At the core of the development of the San Gabriel Valley's Chinese ethnoburb is Monterey Park.²⁰

Monterey Park is an incorporated municipality with its own elected city council in suburban Los Angeles. From the beginning of World War II until 1960, Monterey Park prospered as the wartime economy brought new people from across the country to Southern California.²¹ In the decade immediately after the War, Monterey Park was one of the most affordable suburban bedroom communities—a cozy town with various single-family homes, tree-lined streets, and spacious green lawns. In the 1960s, about 85 percent of housing consisted of detached single family homes, and 4 percent consisted of ten or more units. About two-thirds of the housing was owner-occupied and vacancy rates were about 5 percent.

Postwar Monterey Park was predominantly white. But due to its suburban atmosphere and proximity to downtown Los Angeles, Monterey Park began to draw upwardly mobile Mexican Americans from neighboring East Los Angeles, Japanese Americans from the Westside, and Chinese Americans from Chinatown.²² By 1960, Monterey Park's ethnic makeup was 85 percent non-Hispanic white (down from 99.9 percent in 1950), 12 percent Hispanic, 2.9 percent Asian, and .1 percent black; by 1970, it was 51 percent white, 34 percent Hispanic, and 15 percent Asian (two-thirds Japanese American and one-third Chinese). Many of the Hispanic and Asian Americans arriving in Monterey Park during the 1950s and 1960s were educated, acculturated, and middle class second- or

third-generation immigrants who were driven by the American dream of upward mobility and suburban life. By 1970, Monterey Park became the first and perhaps one of the very few middle class suburbs that were ethnically diverse, with non-Hispanic whites holding a slight majority. The process of ethnic integration was fairly smooth, since it very much conformed to the conventional model of residential assimilation. Most of the new residents were acculturated second- or third-generation members of ethnic minorities and were not perceived as a threat to existing Anglo political and institutional dominance.²³

The arrival of immigrants and investors from Taiwan and the Pacific Rim and the influx of foreign capital that started in the 1970s and accelerated since then set off a dramatic demographic transformation in Monterey Park. By the mid-1980s, the city had been completely transformed from an Anglo bedroom town into a community with an Asian majority and a visible presence of immigrant Chinese. Non-Hispanic white residents declined rapidly from 51 percent in 1970 to 26 percent in 1980, further to 12 percent in 1990, and to 7 percent in 2000. In contrast, the proportion of Asian residents increased from less than 15 percent in 1970 to 34 percent in 1980 and to 56 percent in 1990, making it the first and only Asian-majority city in the United States of the time. As of 2000, Monterey Park's racial composition was 7 percent white, 41 percent Chinese, 21 percent other Asian, 30 percent Hispanic, and 1 percent African American. Those in the other Asian category included Japanese Americans (mostly U.S.-born), Vietnamese, Filipinos, and other Southeast Asians. In 1980, less than a third of the Monterey Park population was foreign born, but the proportion increased to 54 percent by 2000. Not surprisingly, more than three-quarters of those in Monterey Park spoke a language other than English at home. Clearly, this suburban city has been transformed into a typical immigrant-dominant ethnoburb.

Unlike earlier Chinese immigrants who were mainly from rural regions in South China, Monterey Park's Chinese immigrants of the early 1980s were mostly from Taiwan either as investors and entrepreneurs or as professionals.²⁴ Once the Chinese community took shape, family migration and migration from mainland China, Hong Kong, and Southeast Asia followed. By the mid-1980s, the number of mainland Chinese immigrants surpassed that of the Taiwanese. According to the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), among Chinese immigrants who selected Monterey Park as their preferred destination between 1983 and 1990, 44 per-

cent were from the mainland and 42 percent from Taiwan. Yet, the visibility of Taiwanese money, Taiwanese-owned businesses, and Taiwanese involvement in local politics earned Monterey Park the nickname, “Little Taipei,” with which both Taiwanese and mainlanders were identified.

What made Taiwanese immigrants in Monterey Park distinct was that they were disproportionately highly skilled and capital-rich and that many of them obtained immigration visas through direct investment or employment either by Chinese-owned businesses or mainstream American businesses. As of 1990, the Chinese immigrants were more highly skilled than L.A. County’s population: about a quarter of the adult Chinese population completed four years of college and another 17 percent had post-college education compared with 14 percent and 8 percent, respectively, countywide; close to 40 percent held professional occupations, compared with 27 percent countywide; and 16 percent of the workforce was self-employed, compared with 10 percent countywide. A telephone survey of Chinese business owners in Los Angeles also showed that Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs had much higher levels of educational attainment than other immigrant entrepreneurs—88 percent being surveyed reported having earned four years or more of college education, compared with 35 percent of white male business owners. Moreover, Chinese immigrant business owners were nearly twice as likely as Korean business owners (who are known for their propensity for entrepreneurship) to be members of the business-owner class prior to migration (43 percent vs. 24 percent), and some of these entrepreneurs continue to run their businesses in the homeland after migration, or become transnational.²⁵ This selective group of entrepreneurs were not only highly educated with entrepreneurial expertise and skills, but also had extensive homeland and transnational business ties that had been established prior to their arrival in the United States, which were further strengthened through their homeland or transnational businesses and their frequent visits to the homeland.²⁶

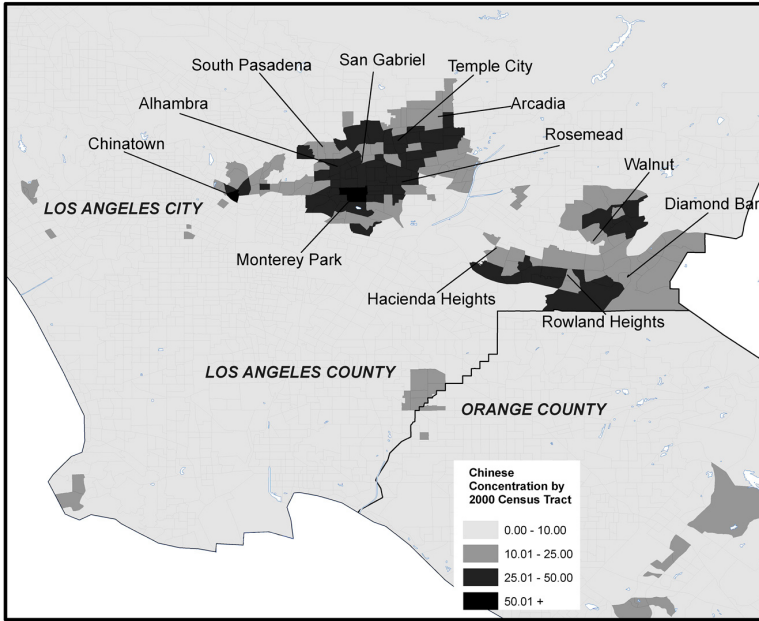
As time goes by, however, Monterey Park has begun to attract Chinese immigrants from the Mainland and other parts of Asia who are not as resourceful. Some arrive in the ethnoburb to join their families while others, many of whom are low-skilled and undocumented, are drawn to the ethnoburb because the expanding enclave economy demands for their cheap labor and because they can easily find housing through relatives and friends.

As a result of intertwined ethnic ties, the Chinese populations have become increasingly fragmented along class lines.

Another distinct characteristic of Monterey Park's Chinese immigrants was the visibility of transnational migrants. In contrast to the traditional male sojourner who left his family behind to find riches in America, a new group of Chinese transnationals—"space-men" as the media calls them—settled their wives and children in Monterey Park while shuttling back and forth over the Pacific Ocean. In other cases, the children—known as "parachute kids"—were left in the United States alone to attain a U.S. education while both their parents remained in Asia.²⁷ Transnational household arrangements became an alternative model of immigrant settlement. Indeed, Monterey Park's newcomers represented a brand new stream of immigrants and a new mode of incorporation. Instead of moving from immigrant enclaves like other native-born Latino or Asian Americans, the new Chinese immigrants inserted themselves directly into the middle class suburb without much acculturation.

As more Chinese immigrants put down their roots in Monterey Park, newer arrivals start to settle in adjacent suburban communities, such as Alhambra, Rosemead, San Gabriel, and Temple City. They branch out north to Arcadia and San Marino, and southeast to Diamond Bar. This trend of residential movement out of, or bypassing, the ethnoburb's core is less noticeable to non-co-ethnic outsiders as to co-ethnics. Part of the reason is class fragmentation of newcomers. In recent years, the number of low-SES immigrants and undocumented immigrants who serve the growing Chinese enclave economy. Figure 1 maps out the spatial distribution of Chinese Americans at the census tract level for Los Angeles County. Patterns of Chinese American settlement generally reflect the duality of concentration and dispersal. These patterns are distinct insofar as the ethnic population has grown beyond the boundaries of the central city and has become increasingly concentrated in multiple locations that expand eastward into the San Gabriel Valley, such as Monterey Park, San Marino, Arcadia, San Gabriel, Alhambra, Rosemead, Temple City, and as far southeast as Hacienda Heights, Rowland Heights, Walnut, and Diamond Bar.

Making up only 3.9 percent of L.A. County's total population (and 1 percent of the total U.S. population), Chinese Americans are overrepresented in many suburban cities in the San Gabriel Valley even though none of these cities has a Chinese majority. As shown in Table 1, there are thirteen cities with over 10,000 people in the United States in which the share of the ethnic Chi-



nese population is five times of that in L.A. County (20 percent), and all are in California and all but two are in Los Angeles's San Gabriel Valley.²⁸ Except for the City of San Francisco, all the cities listed in Table 1 can be considered typical ethnoburbs, which were barely visible before 1980. Another marked characteristic of the ethnoburb is its ethnic plurality, in which non-Hispanic whites comprise only a numerical minority.²⁹ Furthermore, the level of median household incomes at the core of the ethnoburb, in cities like Monterey Park, Alhambra, Rosemead, San Gabriel, is significantly lower than that in Los Angeles County.

The Development of the Enclave Economy in the San Gabriel Valley

Without doubt, contemporary Chinese immigration has driven much of the demographic transformation in Los Angeles' suburbia. The development of the Chinese enclave economy in San Gabriel Valley was initially set off in Monterey Park in the late 1970s, which has transformed the character of the American suburb and made the emerging ethnoburb distinctly Chinese. Prior to 1970, only a few small specialty shops, supermarkets, and restaurants dominated commercial activities in Monterey Park. At night, streets were quiet as residents retired into their comfort-

Table 1: Cities with the Highest Proportions of the Ethnic Chinese Population in the United States, 2000

City	Total Population N	Non-Hispanic White %	Asian %	Chinese %	Median Household Income (\$)
Los Angeles County	9,519,338	31	12	3.9	42,189
Los Angeles City	3,694,820	30	10	2.0	36,687
Monterey Park	60,051	7	62	44	40,724
San Marino	12,945	45	49	43	117,267
Arcadia	53,054	40	45	37	56,100
San Gabriel	39,084	18	50	37	41,791
Alhambra	85,804	14	47	36	39,213
Rosemead	53,505	8	49	33	36,181
Rowland Heights	48,553	16	50	32	52,270
Temple City	33,377	38	39	31	48,722
Walnut	30,004	18	56	31	81,015
Hacienda Heights	53,122	22	36	26	59,485
Diamond Bar	56,287	31	43	20	68,871
Cupertino	50,546	48	44	25	100,411
San Francisco	776,733	44	31	21	55,221

Source: U.S. Census of the Population, 2000, available online at <<http://factfinder.census.gov/>>.

able homes. A former police chief recalled, “You could shoot a cannon off at Atlantic and Garvey [one of the main intersections], and it could fly through the air and roll to a stop without hitting a soul.”³⁰ Today, Chinese-owned office buildings and mini-malls have replaced this bedroom community’s commercial core with a cosmopolitan hub of the Asian Pacific. Various Chinese-owned businesses line up along the main streets with discernible Chinese language signs. The vibrant commercial center expands block after block and is active from early in the morning until late at night, seven days a week. As a resident recalled, “at 3:30 in the morning. . . . I counted thirty-four cars stopped at a red light at Atlantic and Garvey. It looked like rush hour.”³¹ While many Chinese-owned businesses still resemble those in Chinatowns—such as “mom and pop” or “husband-wife” family-run

restaurants, gift shops, food stores, and other small-scale services, newly sprung-up business establishments are bigger and more diverse and modern, much like those in mainstream economies in the United States and in Asia.

The Chinese ethnoburb's economic development was initially fueled, and has continued to be affected, by foreign capital, which was combined with family assets and savings that immigrants brought to or accumulated in the new country. During the early period of economic transformation, real estate development was perhaps the most significant economic activity in Monterey Park. It should be noted that in the 1980s, rampant and speculative land development all over Southern California turned many small bedroom towns into cities with high-density commercial and residential over-development. Monterey Park was simply part of the trend. What made it unique, however, was that the economic boom had an Asian face and responded mainly to the demands of co-ethnic transnationals and immigrants.

The arrival of many Taiwanese investors, realtors, developers, and entrepreneurs, and later the mainland Chinese "nouveaux riches," played a crucial role in reinvigorating a formerly inactive economy and boosting real estate values. In the 1970s, transnational investors and immigrant entrepreneurs from Taiwan invested in Monterey Park because of its growth potential and its convenient location—accessibility to Chinatown and to the Pacific Rim. By the late 1970s, 30 percent of the city's business licenses were registered under Asian names.³² The pace of foreign capital flows accelerated in the following decade as Hong Kong, China, and Southeast Asia started to transfer capital to the United States. With sufficient capital, these investors bought up properties and converted or developed them into both commercial and residential housing. Lots that were vacant in the 1970s were now built up and old bungalows were torn down to make room for commercial or mixed-use real estate developments. By the 1980s, the price of land skyrocketed. Many lots for commercial development sold at \$40 to \$50 per square foot, much higher than the \$8 to \$10 per square foot that supermarkets or department stores could afford to pay during that time. With these inflated prices, developers had to recoup their costs through intensive development—huge luxurious single-family homes were built on joint lots alongside multiple-family apartments and condominiums and high-density office buildings and mini-malls. The total number of housing units in Monterey Park jumped from

12,833 in 1960 to 19,331 in 1980, and again to 20,209 in 2000, representing a 57 percent increase from 1960 to 2000. The proportion of multi-unit apartments (ten units or more) also jumped from 5 percent in 1960 to 14 percent in 2000. According to reports from a leading business real estate company in the region, 60 percent of the shopping and retailing property transactions in the San Gabriel Valley, which were handled by the company, in 1989 was by Chinese investors, and 50 percent of the warehouse purchases in the San Gabriel Valley in 1991 involved Chinese immigrant investors or Chinese-owned firms.

Accompanying real estate development was transnational advertising and marketing to lure Chinese businesses and immigrants to settle in the region. The constant flow of foreign capital toward real estate and land development stimulated tremendous demand for residential and commercial space, not only from Chinese immigrants already in the United States, but also from potential immigrants abroad. As local real estate brokers and developers rushed to capitalize on the highly specialized immigrant market, they promoted Monterey Park as the "Chinese Beverly Hills" and "a Mecca for Chinese businesses" in Asia.³³ A brochure promoting Monterey Park in Taiwan read: "In Monterey Park, you can enjoy the American life quality and Taipei's convenience at the same time."³⁴ Soon after the establishment of the "Little Taipei" in Monterey Park, the Taiwanese quickly dispersed to neighboring cities. This was referred to as the "Taiwan Syndrome": enterprising Taiwanese investors purchased commercial properties and homes in the San Gabriel Valley in order to sell them later to wealthy newcomers from Taiwan.³⁵ Consequently, much of the real estate development was absorbed by Chinese-owned businesses and immigrant families, and home and business purchases in Monterey Park and adjacent cities became a viable channel for further immigration and transnational economic development.

Foreign investments also had a non-for-profit flavor because investments in real estate and local businesses were viewed as tickets to immigration. Many investors and entrepreneurs were even willing to take losses to secure a place in the United States through immigrant visas, or non-immigrant visas that could later be adjusted to permanent residency.³⁶ Consequently, Monterey Park evolved into a commercial and banking hub for transnational businesses and an economic center for producer, retail, and professional services for local Chinese businesses from an even bigger Chinese community that has spilled over rapidly into San Marino,

Arcadia, South Pasadena, and throughout the San Gabriel Valley.³⁷ Potential emigrants in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and mainland China were attracted to Monterey Park and neighboring areas because of the availability of new and affordable homes and a business environment favorable not only to local development but transnational ventures as well.

The proliferation of real estate and commercial developments in Monterey Park and other suburbs in the San Gabriel Valley mirror a new trend of sprawling Chinese immigrant settlement in Los Angeles. In the early 1980s, about one third of all Chinese businesses in the Los Angeles metropolitan area listed in the Chinese language telephone books were located in Chinatown and another third in the San Gabriel Valley. As of 1992, more than 11,000 Chinese-owned firms in Los Angeles were listed in the Chinese language telephone books; of these, only 6 percent were located in Chinatown whereas about 12 percent were located in Monterey Park and another third in neighboring cities in the San Gabriel Valley.³⁸ Valley Boulevard, which runs parallel to Interstate 10 through at least ten cities in the San Gabriel Valley, serves as a window on Chinese business development in the region. Along the boulevard, there are numerous mini-malls, commercial plazas, professional office complexes, restaurants, shops, hotels, and industrial plants with Chinese language signs, creating the feel of prosperous Far Eastern marketplaces.

Like businesses in Chinatown, many businesses in the Chinese ethnoburb continue to concentrate in niches characterized by those with low entry barriers, or those industries in the manufacturing and service sectors shunned by the larger economy. Unlike Chinatown, however, the Chinese ethnoburb also concentrates a wider and more diverse range of businesses of much larger size and scale and creates new economic niches that are not commonly found in Chinatown. Typical Chinatown businesses—restaurants, eateries, grocery stores, gift shops, herbal stores, and garment factories—have been replaced by a large spectrum of upscale restaurants, trendy cafes and coffee houses, huge supermarkets, multi-function shopping centers, and professional service parks. New economic niches emerge that require either much larger start-up capital or much higher human capital, such as in printing and publishing, high-tech manufacturing in computer hardware and software and in biotechnology, commercial equipment, wholesale, real estate, banking, security and commodity brokerage, hotels and motels, data processing, and financial, accounting, advertising, medical and engineering services.

To a varying degree, the Chinese enclave economy in San Gabriel Valley resembles some of the key characteristics of both primary and secondary sectors of the mainstream economy, serving various social mobility and settlement needs of new immigrants and transnationals. Simultaneously, however, such development has led to an observable class fragmentation within the Chinese immigrant community, the diversification of the enclave labor force that includes a significant presence of low-skilled Latino and other Asian labor, and the Third World living conditions among a segment of the immigrant population, co-ethnic and non-co-ethnic alike, producing a much concealed suburban inequality. Moreover, the proliferation of Chinese businesses in the ethnoburb produces circumstances much like those in Chinatown, such as high informality of work and proletarianization of labor, but social dynamics much unlike those in old Chinatown, such as the lack of bounded solidarity and enforceable trust.³⁹ This change also raises new questions about residential assimilation. That is, how may socioeconomic mobility—a measure of assimilation or immigrant success—entail possibilities of downward mobility or immigrant failure in American suburbia?

Social Development in the Chinese Ethnoburb

Demographic transformation and the development of the Chinese enclave economy in the San Gabriel Valley go hand in hand. Ethnic population and business growth have not only become increasingly interdependent, but have also promoted unprecedented social and political developments. One key conceptual distinction between the ethnic economy and the enclave economy is that the latter requires not only a sizeable co-ethnic entrepreneurial class but also a geographical core. San Gabriel's Chinese ethnoburb, though sprawling, serves to anchor communities where a wide variety of ethnic social organizations have emerged side by side with ethnic businesses.

Most visible of these new ethnic organizations are non-profit social service organizations, run by educated immigrants or the children of immigrants, to provide services, such as community cultural centers, cultural programs in public libraries, history projects, English classes, job training centers, employment referral services, health clinics, youth programs, daycare centers, as well as welfare, housing, legal, and family counseling services. Unlike the organizational structure of traditional Chinatown, which was hierarchical and paternalistic and functioned like a family, these new

ethnic social organizations tend to be horizontal and democratic, serving specialized functions.⁴⁰ Unlike members of the old ethnic elite, who, as “cultural managers,” supported traditional Chinese culture, ethnic identity, self-determination, and the status quo in Chinatown,⁴¹ the leaders of new social service organizations are more concerned with interethnic relations, citizen and immigrant rights, civic duties, equality, and the general well-being of the large, ethnically diverse community as a whole.

Also visible in the Chinese ethnoburb are the development of Chinese language schools and ethnic institutions serving young children and youth.⁴² Chinese schools have been an integral part of the organizational structure of the immigrant Chinese community in the United States as well as in the Chinese Diaspora worldwide. In much of the pre-World War-II era, Chinese schools aimed to preserve language and cultural heritage in the second and succeeding generations. Since the 1980s, these ethnic language schools have evolved to a much broader range of functions beyond the preservation of language and culture. In addition to language and cultural classes, contemporary Chinese schools offer K-12 children a variety of academic and enrichment courses and extracurricular activities, ranging from Chinese music, folk dance, calligraphy, calculation with an abacus, and ping-pong to SAT-II (Chinese) prep courses and academic tutoring.⁴³ Most schools are registered as non-profit organizations relying on parental volunteerism and fund-raising from the ethnic community. Parental involvement is much more intense than that in public schools; many parents volunteer to serve as principals and/or administrative officials and teaching assistants.⁴⁴

The development of Chinese schools has also paralleled the development of private supplementary educational institutions since the late 1980s, such as *buxiban* (academic tutoring), early childhood educational programs, and college preparatory centers. For example, driving through the commercial corridor on Valley Boulevard from Monterey Park to Rosemead, a visitor may easily see flashy bilingual signs of these establishments in mini-malls, such as “Little Harvard,” “Ivy League School,” “Little Ph.D.,” “Early Learning Center,” “Brain Child” (a math and English pre-school), “Stanford-to-Be Prep School,” “IQ180,” and “Hope Buxiban.” These children- and youth-oriented institutions have sprung up to join the existing Chinese language schools to constitute a comprehensive system of supplementary education. The core curricula of these various ethnic institutions supplement, rather than compete with, public

school education. The Southern California Chinese Consumer Yellow Pages listed ninety Chinese schools (sixty-four were located in the San Gabriel Valley's Chinese ethnoburb).⁴⁵ Also listed were 135 academic after-school tutoring, including kumon,⁴⁶ 50 art schools/centers, and 90 music/dancing schools, most of which were located in the San Gabriel Valley.⁴⁷

Other spatially rooted new ethnic organizations include religious organizations of all sorts, from Protestant and Catholic churches to Buddhist, Taoist, and other folk religious temples and worship houses. For example, Hsi Lai Temple, a grandiose temple in classical Chinese architectural style, was built in 1988 by a Taiwanese Buddhist organization. Situated on the foothill of Hacienda Heights, the temple is the largest Buddhist temple in North America, offering Dharma services and performing Dharma functions and rituals regularly. But the temple is much more than a religious center. It houses a university with academic degree programs—Bachelor of Arts and Master of Arts in Buddhist studies and in comparative religious studies, and a Master of Business Administration program. It also offers workshops and seminars on Buddhism as well as secular programs on a wide range of topics, including education, immigration, marriage and family, taxation, and legal issues. It serves as a popular site for school field trips, business trips, organization meetings, and interreligious dialogue. The temple attracts worshippers, visitors, and tourists from near and afar.

There are other ethnic organizations emerging in the Chinese ethnoburb like professional organizations, alumni associations, and homeland district associations, which seek to aid Chinese immigrants' social mobility. They aim to provide professional and social networks, and promote information exchange on opportunities in the United States, China, and other Chinese diasporic communities. Other goals include building U.S.-China economic relations, fostering greater Chinese diasporic economic exchanges, raising funds for relief of natural disasters in China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, and protecting the interests of Chinese immigrants in the United States. These ethnic organizations depend on sponsorship and funds raised from Chinese immigrants and Chinese-owned businesses and from mainstream businesses and private foundations.

Last but not least, ethnic political and civil rights organizations can be found in the Chinese ethnoburb. Most of these organizations are run by second-generation Chinese immigrants who came

of age in the late 1960s and formed the core of the Asian American Movement on college campuses on the west coast. Inspired by the civil rights movements, these political organizations are concerned primarily with civil rights issues, particularly those relating to minority and immigrant rights, representation in the mainstream economy and politics, and intergroup relations. In effect, these ethnic political organizations have brought ethnic group members together in line with the norms and standards of the civil society rather than those of the narrowly defined ethnic community and further strengthened Chinese Americans' political power base.

One common characteristic of the various ethnic organizations in the Chinese ethnoburb is that leadership and staff are composed mainly of U.S.-born Chinese Americans or Chinese immigrants who are highly assimilated, as measured by levels of English proficiency, education, occupation, income, and place of residence. The fact that ethnic organizations and networks are actually built and maintained by the socio-economically mobile and highly assimilated indicates that assimilation is not a clear-cut, zero-sum process. The formation of the Chinese ethnoburb in the San Gabriel Valley demonstrates that high ethnic concentration, organization, and linguistic isolation are not incompatible with immigrants' successful adaptation into American society. Moreover, resources mobilized by co-ethnic businesses and institutions tend to benefit co-ethnic members to the exclusion of non-co-ethnic members, which creates potential for intergroup conflicts as well as possibilities of multi-ethnic coalition.

Political Participation

Because many suburban communities are independent municipalities, the concentration of ethnic populations makes it possible for powerful voting blocs to form and for co-ethnic members or those who are sensitive to immigrant and ethnic minority issues to get elected. These possibilities, in turn, promote meaningful political participation, even among first-generation immigrants.

Monterey Park is a case in point. Monterey Park is an independent municipality. From the 1940s to the mid 1970s, politics in Monterey Park was dominated by an "old-boy network"—a local power structure consisting of predominantly white Republican professionals and businessmen. This power structure was challenged by the arrival of Japanese Americans and Mexican Americans in the 1950s and 1960s and the unprecedented arrival of Asian immigrants, mainly Chinese, during the mid-1970s and

1980s.⁴⁸ While some democrats were willing to adapt the previously white institutions to accommodate new immigrants and minorities, others sided with conservatives against the Chinese newcomers and their ethnic community development. When immigrants with strong economic resources form a numerical majority, however, city politicians can not possibly ignore them. The growth of Chinese immigrants and the dominance of Chinese businesses tipped the power balance and transformed local politics into a politics of diversity.⁴⁹

The shrinking non-Hispanic white population along with the decreasing influence of the old white conservative elite has created an opportunity for young multiethnic businesspeople, minorities, immigrants, women, and multiculturalists as well as nativists to engage in politics, opening up a new political order in Monterey Park.⁵⁰ In 1983, the year Lily Lee Chen was inaugurated as the first Chinese American mayor, Monterey Park's five-member city council became truly multi-ethnic with one white, two Mexican Americans, one Filipino American, and one Chinese American.⁵¹ Time magazine featured this "majority minority" city council as representative of multiculturalism and as a "successful suburban melting pot." Growing resentment against demographic, cultural, and economic changes relating to the Chinese newcomers, however, soon swept the minority incumbents out of office. In 1986, three council members were replaced by long-established white residents, returning the council to white control. It promptly launched an anti-immigrant campaign under the banner of the defense of Americanism: "English, the family, God, the nation, and the neighborhood."⁵²

The backlash was short-lived, however, as more immigrant Chinese became naturalized citizens and mobilized politically. Since 1988, Monterey Park's City Council has had a Chinese American presence. Judy Chu, a second-generation Chinese American, was elected to the city council from 1988 to 2001. Others such as Samuel Kiang, David Lau, Betty Tom Chu, and Mike Eng have served as city council members. Betty Tom Chu served as mayor in 2006 and David Lau in 2007. Local election indicates the greater political maturity of Chinese immigrants in Monterey Park, who have continued to use their increasing demographic presence and economic power to challenge traditional Anglo domination in the city council.

The electoral success of the Chinese immigrant community reaffirms the democratic message that every vote counts, which

in turn empowers Chinese immigrants, nurtures a greater sense of civic duty, and facilitates their incorporation into the American polity. Today, the Asian constituency extends beyond Monterey Park to other cities in the San Gabriel Valley. In 1995, Joaquin Lim was elected to the Walnut City Council in 1995 and became mayor of the city in 1999. In 1997, Wen P. Chang, a Taiwan-born businessman, became the first person of Chinese descent to be elected to the Diamond Bar City Council, served as mayor the following year, and was reelected for two consecutive terms. In 2001, Ben Wong became mayor of West Covina. In 2002, John Wuo was elected to Arcadia City Council and served as mayor in 2005. In 2003, Judy S. Wong, a Taiwan-born community activist, was elected to the city council of Temple City, and is the first Chinese American member to be elected to that body. In 2004, Mike Ten became mayor of South Pasadena. In 2005, Matthew Lin, became the first Chinese American mayor of San Marino. In 2006, Chi Mui, a China-born businesswoman, was sworn in as San Gabriel City's first Asian and first Chinese-American mayor. In the same year, Joaquin Lim was reelected as mayor of Walnut City and Mary W. Su was elected to the Walnut City Council. At present, Chinese Americans have been elected to boards of Alhambra Unified School District (USD), Arcadia USD, Garvey USD, Hacienda-La Puente USD, Montebello USD, Rowland USD, San Marino USD, and South Pasadena USD. Most significantly, Judy Chu was elected in 2001 to the California legislature's 49th Assembly District by multi-ethnic support, representing Monterey Park, Alhambra, Rosemead, San Gabriel, San Marino, El Monte, and South El Monte in the San Gabriel Valley. Mike Eng was elected to succeed Chu in representing the Forty-Ninth Assembly District in 2006.⁵³

Discussion and Conclusion

Recent studies of new immigrant communities and the case of a Chinese ethnoburb in the San Gabriel Valley shed light on immigrants' residential mobility and ethnic community formation.⁵⁴ First, new immigrants are socioeconomically diverse. Many newcomers continue to converge in the central city as a first stop in the journey to attain the American dream. A visible number, however, are bypassing the traditional staging ground and moving directly into affluent suburban communities and situating themselves comfortably on the middle or upper-middle rungs of the mobility ladder. This phenomenon distorts the correlation between

levels of acculturation and residential assimilation predicted by conventional assimilation theories. It opens up the possibility that immigrants' initial place of residence is not simply a staging ground for somewhere better, but is in fact their final desired destination. Residential assimilation is not the end result or "reward" for acculturation well-done; it may instead be attained at the very inception of immigrants' settlement in the new land. Thus, ethnicization and assimilation are not incompatible.

Second, the tangible socioeconomic resources that immigrants bring—money, skills, and other assets—are often linked to intangible ethnic resources—easy access to established local and/or global social networks and material capital. This linkage enhances the value of individual holdings to create a new mode of immigrant incorporation—transnational entrepreneurship and global investment in local development. This mode of incorporation alters the way ethnic economies operate and facilitates the integration of ethnic economies into an increasingly globalized local economy. While high levels of ethnic concentration and ethnic entrepreneurship are not antithetic to residential assimilation, however, the development of the Chinese ethnoburb has reproduced spatial disparities as immigrants of modest socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds have arrived in relatively large numbers and cluster around it, forming a core-fringe structure.⁵⁵ For example, in Monterey Park, median housing price was \$216,500 in 2000, down from \$238,800 in 1990 and the proportion of owner-occupied housing decreased from 65 percent in 1960 to 55 percent in 1990 and 54 percent in 2000. Median household incomes in the ethnoburban core (e.g. Monterey Park, Alhambra, San Gabriel, and Rosemead) were below Los Angeles County's average (See Table 1).

Socioeconomic diversity has implications for both immigrants and natives. For Chinese immigrants, class segmentation would mean less desirable living conditions, greater social service burdens, and a high risk of bearing a dual stigma – that of foreigner and that of the poor. As a way to avoid association with working-class co-ethnics, the more affluent Chinese immigrants are under the pressure of out-migration. Several immigrant Chinese business owners in Monterey Park, whom we interviewed, told us that they had moved out of Monterey Park recently to avoid "overcrowdedness" and "gangs in schools." Some newcomers even express a reluctance to settle in Monterey Park. A Chinese home buyer moving from New York told us, "I wouldn't want to buy into Monterey Park. . .because it's so congested, crowded, and so

many [poor] Chinese."⁵⁶ Interestingly, these feelings mirror those of established residents. For natives, the influx of working-class immigrants would mean a disruption of middle class lifestyles and the threat of importing inner-city or Third-World social problems. Such intra-ethnic inequality and class division may not be conveniently neutralized by traditional mechanisms of social support and control—bounded solidarity and enforceable trust—as in old Chinatowns under legal exclusion and racial segregation.

Third, the size and the economic power of new immigrants heighten ethnic visibility and conflict with the host society. The influx of affluent immigrants and the growth of ethnic economies stir up the tranquility of complacent “bedroom” towns. Unlike the long-standing immigrant enclaves in the inner city that have continued to absorb the successive waves of immigrants fairly smoothly, suburban “bedroom” communities have experienced widespread immigration of middle class immigrants and rapid economic growth, and the results have been confrontational. In the past, the movement of ethnic minorities of lower SES into urban neighborhoods triggered off white flight into the suburbs. At present, the movement of immigrants of higher SES into the suburbs has also ushered a similar trend of white flight, because new immigrants have settled without going through the time-honored process of acculturation. They pose a new threat to the established white middle class residents who fear being “un-Americanized” by the newcomers. The Chinese ethnoburb shows that affluent immigrants from Asia, no less than blacks and Hispanics, can be perceived as a threat to white middle class communities when they achieve a substantial presence. Their high socioeconomic standing, contribution to the local economy, and adaptive attitude do not make them immune to criticism. Rather, they can pose a different kind of threat, one that undermines longtime residents’ sense of place and identity and their notion of “Americanness.”⁵⁷ Among established natives in Monterey Park, for example, there is a deep-seated fear that their neighborhoods are turning into Chinatowns or microcosms of Taipei, Shanghai, or Hong Kong, which they imagine as the most crowded, congested, and polluted cities in the world. A Japanese American on his return to Monterey Park complained, “Damn it, Dad, where the hell did all these Chinese come from? Shit, this isn’t our town any more.”⁵⁸ Resistance from native-born residents, in turn, reinforces immigrant ethnicity, giving rise to politics of diversity.⁵⁹

Fourthly, the very fact that Chinese immigrants are residentially assimilated into the suburbia and yet have seemingly “returned”

to the ethnic community, as illustrated in the development of the Chinese ethnoburb in the San Gabriel Valley, indicates that a fixed notion of the ethnic community as an isolated enclave no longer applies. The Chinese ethnoburb is multi-ethnic and unlikely to be dominated by a single national-origin group. Diversity at the local level has made intra-ethnic and inter-ethnic relations key community issues. Among co-ethnic members, the mixing of co-ethnics from different class backgrounds gives the community the power and vitality to combat the trends of ghettoization and social isolation encountered in the inner city, but simultaneously turns the place into another type of "staging place" for the more affluent immigrants. Living side by side with other ethnic group members provides opportunity for intimate social contact, but also garners potential tension. Even though intergroup conflicts are much more overt in Monterey Park than in Chinatown, often focusing on growth control movements and pro-Official English resolutions, intergroup coalition also seem more effective because native-born Latino and Asian Americans tend to align with immigrant Chinese to act on racial issues in a city where minority groups form the numerical majority. We should therefore start to look at ethnic communities of the twenty-first century as integral to rather than separate from the mainstream society, and view each ethnic group and its culture, despite its distinct internal dynamics, as essentially contributing to rather than competing with the mainstream culture.

In sum, the development of the Chinese ethnoburb in the San Gabriel Valley provides useful insights into the understanding of the paradox of ethnicization and assimilation. The ultimate question is: are Chinese immigrants involved in the ethnic community, ethnic economies, and ethnic organizations being assimilated into American life? The answer is: it depends. To the extent that they feel comfortable at home in America, they are assimilated; and such assimilation can be attributed to the tangible and intangible supports, or social capital, provided by the ethnic community. Even though adherence to ethnicity by itself may seem to negatively influence immigrant assimilation into the larger host society, the adaptational experiences of today's immigrants are not necessarily zero-sum but rather multidimensional. Thus, assimilation of this sort does not conform to the conventional notion of assimilation, which underscores a unified White Anglo-Saxon Protestant core culture. Instead, new Chinese immigrants are being assimilated into the multifaceted ethnic milieu that characterizes America.⁶⁰

However, to the extent that the new Chinese immigrants comfortably live and work in their own ethnoburbs, they may, intentionally or unintentionally, bypass opportunities and impose new constraints on themselves and the ethnic community. One of the main constraints on the ethnic community is its intraethnic diversity along class lines. The immigrant success in the ethnoburb has largely overshadowed the plight of working-class immigrants, some of whom undocumented, whose mobility prospects remain problematic. This situation raises a series of questions that require further study. How does the ethnic community cope with intra-group diversity in origin and socioeconomic status? To what extent are existing mechanisms that used to hold the ethnic community together effective or out-dated for today's heterogeneous ethnic population and ethnic businesses? Would working-class and undocumented Chinese immigrants be better off in Chinatown or in Chinese ethnoburbs? Would these immigrants be trapped in permanent disadvantaged status in a relatively affluent community or would they be able to transcend their disadvantages on community-based ethnic resources?

Another constraint is the ethnic community's exclusivity. We have seen signs that Chinese immigrants are not mixing well with native-born non-co-ethnics in ethnic enclaves and ethnoburbs.⁶¹ This lack of primary-level or intimate interpersonal relationships may render Chinese immigrants and their children vulnerable to negative stereotyping and racial discrimination. For example, non-Chinese residents in the Chinese ethnoburb often feel that they are being pushed out of their own backyards and that they are being un-Americanized by Chinese immigrants with higher-than-average levels of education and household incomes but relatively low English proficiency and high linguistic isolation.⁶² Native-born Asian Americans are also stereotyped as foreigners and are perennially caught in situations in which they feel compelled to prove their loyalty and patriotism.⁶³ Thus, the Chinese ethnoburb must continue to find innovative ways to collectively counter stereotypes and foster greater inter-ethnic understanding and inclusion.

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Notes

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