CHAPTER FOUR

A Tale of Two Metropolises

New Immigrant Chinese Communities in New York and Los Angeles

Min Zhou and Rebecca Kim

Research on immigrant settlements has long stressed the transitory nature of inner-city ethnic enclaves as springboards for integration into mainstream host societies. Chicago’s Slavic Village, New York’s Little Italy, and Los Angeles’s Little Tokyo are living models, whereby immigrants toiled to allow their children or grandchildren to “melt” into suburbia as “indistinguishable” Americans. In the past three decades, however, this classic enclave-to-suburbia mobility model has been challenged. While many newcomers continue to converge in the central city as a first stop in the journey to attain the American dream, a visible number has bypassed the traditional staging place, moving directly into affluent urban neighborhoods or middle-class suburbs and situating themselves at the middle or upper-middle rungs of the mobility ladder. This seems to distort the correlation between levels of acculturation and residential mobility predicted by conventional assimilation theories; it opens up a possibility that the initial place of residence on arrival may be an end in itself.

As a result, many city neighborhoods that, though within the city boundaries, are beyond the inner urban core and that non-Hispanic whites once dominated have evolved into either resegregated enclaves, in which a single racial/ethnic minority group dominates, or “global” neighborhoods, in which diverse native-born minority groups live side by side with new immigrants of different national origins. Some of the resegregated neighborhoods experience decline, a phenomenon that has been studied in great detail. Others, however, are thriving and growing, with immigrants possessing higher than average education and incomes and capable of creating their own ethnic economies.

In this chapter, we focus on two emerging middle-class immigrant communities: Flushing in New York City, which, though an urban neighborhood, is located well beyond the inner-city core, and Monterey Park, the suburban municipality in Los Angeles County just beyond the boundaries of the city of Los Angeles.

Recent studies of immigration and new immigrant communities have shed fresh light on neighborhood transition in a number of important ways. (In addition to Sabagh and Bozorgmehr in chap. 3 of this volume, these studies include Winnick [1990], Fong [1994], Tseng [1994], Horton [1995], Y. Zhou [1996], Li [1997], and Saito [1998].) First, new immigrants are socioeconomically diverse. Second, tangible class resources that immigrants brought with them—money, skills, and other assets—are often linked to intangible ethnic resources, such as easy access to established ethnic and global networks and to foreign capital. This linkage enhances the value of individual holdings to create a new mode of immigrant incorporation: transnational entrepreneurship and overseas investment in local economic development. This mode of incorporation alters the way ethnic economies operate and facilitates their integration into the larger economy that is also increasingly globalized. Third, the large numbers and the economic power of newcomers heighten ethnic visibility. The influx of affluent Asian immigrants can be perceived as a threat to the established non-Hispanic white middle-class communities in which new immigrants have settled without going through the time-honored process of acculturation. Resistance from established residents, in turn, reinforces immigrant ethnicity, giving rise to a politics of diversity.

Our study examines the following questions with a focus on neighborhood transition: What are the new immigrant enclaves beyond the urban core like? How do different groups of immigrants negotiate their way into American metropolises? How may community development differ from place to place? What are the consequences and prospects of this new type of community development? Overall, we seek to understand the ways in which global neighborhoods challenge the notion of assimilation and speculate about how these new forms of immigrant enclaves contribute to our understanding of end-of-millennium urban and suburban dynamics.

GLOBALIZATION, IMMIGRATION, AND CHANGING PATTERNS OF SETTLEMENT

Globalization and Urban Transformation

Since the 1960s, two major trends have occurred simultaneously: globalization and immigration. Globalization leads to sweeping changes in
the urban economy, dividing urban labor markets into a dominant core sector characterized by knowledge-intensive or capital-intensive jobs that offer high wages, good working conditions, career stability and promotion opportunities, and a marginal but sizable sector characterized by low skill, labor-intensive work that offers minimum wages, poor working conditions, and little upward mobility (chap. 2; see also Edwards 1979; Tolbert et al. 1980). Of the low-wage manufacturing jobs that do exist, many have become highly concentrated in the central city, and access to these jobs depends largely on ethnic networks, making it harder for less skilled central-city residents to take advantage of economic growth and to move up socioeconomically (Waldinger 1986a). Accompanying globalization is speedy suburbanization of the non-Hispanic white population, a trend in New York, Los Angeles, and many other large metropolises across America (table 1A.2).

Such changing contexts of reception pose a daunting challenge for immigrants if they are to follow the conventional route of social mobility. On the one hand, the neighborhoods in which they first settle may be composed mostly of American-born minorities or other immigrants. New immigrants may have less contact with the native-born, middle-class, non-Hispanic whites with whom they are expected to assimilate. Further, many of the jobs available in the local labor markets either require advanced education and skills or do not pay decent wages, leading to possibilities of segmented assimilation outcomes. However, new patterns of assimilation have also become visible in light of these changing receiving contexts.

Post-World War II Chinese Immigration

Chinese immigration to the United States occurred several decades before the mass migration from southern and eastern Europe. Chinatowns in San Francisco, New York City, and the city of Los Angeles were typical of the nation's oldest immigrant enclaves. But unlike early immigrants from southern and eastern Europe, who were expected to assimilate into the mainstream society as quickly as possible, early Chinese immigrants were legally barred from naturalization and assimilation. They were forced to take refuge in a predominantly Chinese bachelors' society, creating jobs for themselves to avoid direct competition with native workers while enabling themselves to fulfill a sojourner's dream of returning to their homeland with gold and glory (M. Zhou 1992). The lifting of Chinese exclusion acts in the Second World War opened up other occupational channels for the Chinese. Many of them entered the military, the shipyards, and the civil service; and some were engaged in wholesale trade and operated grocery stores and other small businesses that were left vacant by the forced removal of the Japanese to internment camps (Waldinger and Tseng 1992).

Between 1960 and 2000, the number of Chinese-Americans grew dramatically from 237,292 to 2.8 million, with much of this growth attributed to immigration: more than 1.3 million Chinese from China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong were admitted to the United States as legal permanent residents between 1961 and 2000 (U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service 2001). As of 1990, foreign-born Chinese accounted for about two-thirds of the Chinese-ancestry population nationwide and close to three-quarters in the New York and Los Angeles metropolitan areas.

Unlike the "old-timers" who were uniformly unskilled laborers from the southern region of Guangdong Province, new Chinese immigrants come from more diverse origins and socioeconomic backgrounds. The three main sources of Chinese immigration are mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. In recent years, Chinese immigrants from Southeast Asia and the Americas have also been in evidence. Immigrant Chinese from different origins or different regions of the same origin do not necessarily share the same culture. Language is perhaps the most significant cultural barrier separating Cantonese-speaking coethnics from the Mandarin-speaking coethnics from Taiwan and from the mainland.

The new Chinese immigrants have been disproportionately drawn from highly educated and professional segments of the sending societies. The 1990 census showed that foreign-born Chinese (aged 25–64) with four or more years of college education were almost twice as common as U.S.-born non-Hispanic whites (42 percent vs. 21 percent). Foreign-born Chinese were also more likely to hold professional occupations than U.S.-born non-Hispanic whites (35 percent vs. 27 percent).

The New York and Los Angeles regions have continued to serve as the largest urban centers of Chinese settlement, with each accounting for more than 15 percent of the Chinese-ancestry population in the United States. The proportion of immigrant Chinese among all immigrants (Asians and non-Asians) in New York and Los Angeles is now about similar (4.2 percent and 5.7 percent of their respective regions in 2000).

In 1970, the Asian population of the New York region was predominately (66 percent) Chinese, in contrast with Los Angeles where Filipinos and Japanese were about as numerous as Chinese. But by 2000 New York's Asian population was as diverse as Los Angeles's, and Chinese were now even slightly outnumbered by Asian Indians (fig. 3.4).

However, at least in 1990, the composition of the Chinese immigrant
Table 4.1. Selected Characteristics of the Chinese-American Population:
New York and Los Angeles Metropolitan Areas (PMSA)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>New York</th>
<th>Los Angeles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Chinese American population in 1990</td>
<td>246,817</td>
<td>245,033</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Chinese American population in 2000</td>
<td>372,091</td>
<td>329,352</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place of birth (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>21.9</td>
<td>23.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainland China</td>
<td>47.5</td>
<td>27.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taiwan</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>19.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>22.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socioeconomic status (among the foreign born only):</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average years of schooling</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>15.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managerial and professional occupations (%)</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median household income ($)</td>
<td>29,667</td>
<td>36,224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residence (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinatown, 1990</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinatown, 2000</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flushing, N.Y., 1990</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flushing, N.Y., 2000</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monterey Park, Calif.,</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monterey Park, Calif.,</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The New York PMSA consists of New York City plus Rockland, Westchester, and Putnam Counties. The Los Angeles PMSA consists of Los Angeles County. The birth and socioeconomic status data are from the 1990 census, adapted from J. B. Zhou (1998), table 1, 4, and 5. In 1990 and 2000, New York's Chinatown included fourteen census tracts (6, 8, 16, 18, 27, 28, 31, 31, 32, 33, 34, 34, 35, 36, 37, and 38). Los Angeles's Chinatown included six census tracts (4079, 4179, 1979, 1979, 1979, 1979, and 1979). In 1990, Monterey Park, Calif., included thirteen census tracts (4817.01, 4817.11, 4817.12, 4817.02, 4817.03, 4817.04, 4817.05, 4817.06, 4817.07, 4817.08, 4817.09, and 4817.10). In 2000, Monterey Park included fifteen census tracts (4817.01, 4817.11, 4817.12, 4817.02, 4817.03, 4817.04, 4817.05, 4817.06, 4817.07, 4817.08, 4817.09, 4817.10, 4817.11, 4817.12, 4817.13, 4817.14, 4817.15, 4817.16, 4817.17, 4817.18, 4817.19, and 4817.20).

The suburbanization of the Chinese population, whether by direct immigration to the suburbs or by movement there from the inner city, has proceeded faster and is more dispersed in Los Angeles than in New York. Figures 4.1 and 4.2 show the residential concentrations of Chinese-Americans at the census tract level for the New York and Los Angeles regions, respectively. In New York, new Chinese neighborhoods are visible in Queens and Brooklyn (fig. 4.3), geographically distant from Manhattan's old Chinatown but within the municipal boundaries of the central city. There are new Chinese communities much farther out, many of which consist of middle-class Chinese immigrants associated with universities or high-technology corporations. Examples include Stony Brook on Long Island, the site of a campus of the State University of New York; Princeton Junction, Dutch Neck, and Plainsboro, associated with Princeton University and the Route 1 high-tech corridor; and Southeast Piscataway, associated with Rutgers University.

In the Los Angeles region, patterns of Chinese immigrant settlement have, as in New York, moved away from the inner-city old Chinatown, but they have grown much beyond the boundaries of the central city and become increasingly concentrated eastward into substantial suburban municipalities and areas—as close as Monterey Park (41 percent Chinese), San Marino (41 percent), Rosemead (29 percent), Alhambra (33 percent), San Gabriel (25 percent), Temple City (28 percent), and Arcadia (34 percent) and as far east as Hacienda Heights (22 percent), Rowland Heights (30 percent), Walnut (29 percent), and Diamond Bar (18 percent). (See table 4.2 and fig. 4.4.) Whereas in 1990 Monterey Park was the only city in the United States with an Asian majority, by 2000 there were five such cities in California, with three of these in the Los Angeles region—Cerritos, Monterey Park, and Walnut. By contrast, not a single city in the New York region came close to having an Asian majority, and none had even a high concentration of Chinese-American population ("high concentration" is defined as twice the group's proportional share in the total population of the region).  

Despite now being quite spread out compared with the past few decades, close to 15 percent of the New York metropolitan area's Chinese lived in old Chinatown in 2000, down from 20 percent in 1990. Old Chinatown is still highly concentrated by ethnicity—seven out of fourteen tracts contain a Chinese majority and another three contain 25 percent or more Chinese, and overall, about 56 percent of the residents are Chinese. But Los Angeles's Chinatown has witnessed a more
Figure 4.1. Residential Concentrations of Chinese: New York Region

Figure 4.2. Residential Concentrations of Chinese: Los Angeles Region
rapid decline of ethnic concentration. Less than a third of the residents are Chinese, only one of six tracts maintains a Chinese majority, and only 2 percent of the Chinese in the Los Angeles metropolitan area lived in old Chinatown in 2000 down from 4 percent in 1990.3

In sum, the recent surge of Chinese immigration has been accompanied by residential dispersion. The change does not appear to be associated with the disappearance of old Chinatowns—New York’s, for example, has actually grown and expanded in new directions, taking over decaying adjacent neighborhoods (see fig. 4.3 and M. Zhou 1992). However, differences in place of origin, language/dialect, and class status, intertwined with ethnic networks and global market forces, contribute to the rise of new “satellite” Chinatowns or middle-class Chinese communities in areas away from the central city. Next, we describe two such communities and examine how immigration and new urban processes affect community development and immigrant adaptation.

Table 4.2. Cities in California for Which the Population Is More Than 40% Asian in 2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CITY</th>
<th>% ASIAN</th>
<th>% CHINESE</th>
<th>TOTAL POPULATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alhambra (LACMSA)</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>85,804</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arcadia (LACMSA)</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>53,054</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cerritos (LACMSA)</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>51,488</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cupertino (SFCMSA)</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>50,546</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daly City (SFCMSA)</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>103,621</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diamond Bar (LACMSA)</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>56,287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hercules (SFCMSA)</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>19,488</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Palma (LACMSA)</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15,408</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midpitas (SFCMSA)</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>62,698</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monterey Park (LACMSA)</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>60,051</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosmead (LACMSA)</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>53,505</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Gabriel (LACMSA)</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>59,804</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temple City (LACMSA)</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>33,377</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Marino (LACMSA)</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>12,945</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union City (SCMSA)</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>66,869</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walnut (LACMSA)</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>30,004</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Note: Rowland Heights, featured in figures 4.1 and 4.3, is a CDP (census designated place)—namely, an identifiable place that is not, however, a city. In 2000, Rowland Heights was 25% Chinese, 8% Korean and 15% other Asian. LACMSA = Los Angeles consolidated metropolitan statistical area, SFCMSA = San Francisco consolidated metropolitan statistical area.

**FLUSHING: AN URBAN NEIGHBORHOOD IN TRANSITION**

**A Neighborhood within a Large City**

Flushing is located in North-Central Queens, New York (see fig. 4.1). Although it is quite far from Manhattan’s Chinatown, convenient access to the subway makes the commute relatively easy. Before the surge of contemporary immigration, Flushing resembled the main features of a suburban bedroom community—tranquil, cozy, and relatively low density. It shared the postwar suburban development that affected all of Queens, resulting in a mixture of housing types, including block after block of development-style single-family units, as well as numerous mid- and high-rise apartment buildings and projects. As is the case in all parts of New York City, there are pockets of considerable affluence and old stately homes in Flushing. Since the 1960s, the total number of year-round housing units in Flushing has doubled, or tripled in the surrounding area, and the housing stock has been dominated by multi-family dwellings and apartment units. Overall, the owner occupancy rate of Flushing’s housing stock is much lower than that of Queens (38 per-
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welcome in the neighborhood. A long-time Chinese resident who was married to a white American recalled that, when she and her husband decided to move to Flushing, she did not go with her husband to look for housing. She explained, “Because they [whites] didn’t want to see Chinese here. At that time, there were few Chinese around in the community. I was not the only one, but there weren’t many.” According to this resident, there was only one Chinese restaurant and one Chinese laundry in Flushing in the early 1960s.4

Since the mid-1970s, Flushing has rapidly emerged as a multiethnic neighborhood. Two demographic trends—non-Hispanic white flight and Asian influx—contributed to the transformation. Between 1970 and 1980, the non-Hispanic white population of Flushing fell by 55 percent and declined further by another 42 percent between 1980 and 1990, far exceeding the rate of decline in Queens and New York City as a whole. By 2000, non-Hispanic whites were a small minority (from 2 to 20 percent) in every census tract in Flushing, while the proportions of Asians had risen to a majority in all but two tracts. Non-Hispanic whites in Flushing as of 2000 made up only 13 percent of the neighborhood’s population (down from 24 percent in 1990), compared with 33 percent in New York City as a whole. Flushing’s black population

The Newcomers

In demographic terms, Flushing is clearly a neighborhood that has experienced rapid transition and is in this sense similar to many other neighborhoods in New York. However, at least in relative terms, Flushing is booming with the arrival of new immigrants. Between 1980 and 1990, Flushing’s population increased by 14 percent, four times higher than the rate of growth for metropolitan New York as a whole. The population growth has continued into the 1990s.

Before the surge in contemporary immigration, Flushing was a neighborhood of mostly non-Hispanic white, moderate-income, working-class residents. In the early days, Chinese and other minorities were not

Figure 4.4. Korean-Dominated Shopping Center, “Super Market Mall,” Rowland Heights, on Fullerton Street near Highway 60 (the Pomona Freeway). One block away is a much larger Chinese-dominated shopping center. Rowland Heights is 50 percent Asian (29 percent Chinese, 8 percent Korean). Suburban concentrations of middle-class and wealthy Asians continue to grow eastward beyond such concentrations as Monterey Park and San Gabriel (see fig. 4.2). The location in this photo is twenty-five miles east of downtown Los Angeles.
has also declined, making up about 6 percent of the total in 2000 (down from 11 percent in 1990). As of 2000, Chinese and other Asians made up 56 percent of the neighborhood’s population (up from 41 percent in 1990), and Latinos comprised 21 percent. Figure 4.6 represents these changes.

Superimposed onto the base of the remaining residents, most of whom are of European ancestries, are three large groups of Asian immigrants: Chinese (27 percent of Flushing’s population), Korean (13 percent), and Indian (10 percent). There are also many new immigrants from virtually all parts of the world. Representatives of the three largest Asian groups are all clearly visible in the central business district of Flushing, although the concentrations rarely extend more than a few blocks. Flushing is often referred to as the “satellite” Chinatown or Little Taipei, though there is nothing in Flushing that matches the ethnic concentration of old Chinatowns in Manhattan.

Flushing is clearly a new immigrant neighborhood. The most significant characteristic is the high proportion of the foreign born. As of 1990, 43 percent of the residents were born abroad, which was distinctively higher than the corresponding figure for the whole of Queens Borough (29 percent), and the rest of the New York metropolitan area (27 percent). Fifty-seven percent of residents moved into Flushing since 1975; 46 percent of the residents spoke a language other than English at home, and 11 percent reported that they speak English poorly. Flushing had a lower unemployment rate, a lower poverty rate, a higher median household income, and a lower proportion of single-parent households than the borough of Queens and metropolitan New York as a whole. One plausible explanation is that Flushing’s Asian immigrants are considerably better educated than either the average immigrant or the average U.S. resident. In Flushing, college graduates were almost two times as common among immigrants from mainland China, and nearly four times as common among immigrants from Taiwan, as compared with other residents.

The Chinese immigrant community in Flushing was initially built by foreign capital from Taiwan and Taiwanese immigrants. Many Taiwanese came to Flushing because they had few ties to Manhattan’s old Chinatown and did not identify with the old-timers and their family-sponsored immigrants who are predominantly Cantonese. Their superior educational backgrounds and abundant economic resources enabled them to build their own enclave away from the existing center of Chinese settlement (Zhou and Logan 1991). It appears that once the movement to Flushing began, other Chinese followed suit; some moved in from Chinatown as a step up the socioeconomic ladder, while others moved in directly from abroad. Thus, Chinese immigrants in Flushing are more diverse in their places of origin and class backgrounds than those in Manhattan’s Chinatown.

**Ethnic Economies and Neighborhood Revitalization**

Before the urban transformation, the retail scene in Flushing was dominated by an amalgam of small specialty shops and services. There was a mix of furniture and appliance stores, restaurants, and discount establishments, most of which were operated as typical mom-and-pop stores; there were also a small number of large department stores. New York’s overall economic recession in the early 1970s hit the Flushing business community heavily, causing many small shops and commercial enterprises to close down, commercial vacancy rates to increase, and property values to drop. The same structural disadvantages that plagued the New York metropolitan area—a significant net loss of manufacturing jobs—was also encountered in Flushing.

This trend, however, was dramatically reversed with the arrival of immigrants from different parts of Asia since the 1970s. With the injection of massive amounts of immigrant capital and entrepreneurship from Taiwan, and to a lesser extent from Korea and India, Flushing is well positioned to come to the forefront of an urban economy dominated by the service, commercial, and consumption sectors. Since 1975, new retail and office development has sprung up regularly in Flushing’s downtown area. Property values in Flushing increased from 50 to 100 percent during the 1980s, and commercial vacancy rates have plummeted from 7 percent in the late 1970s to less than 1 percent in the early 1990s (Parvin 1991, 22).

Today, commercial development is extraordinarily active with new
businesses ever enlarging the commercial core. In the very heart of the
downtown commercial and transportation hub, the multilingual signs of
several mainstream bank branches and Asian-owned banks stand at
the busiest intersection. Just a few blocks from the subway station, in
what was until recently an aging neighborhood rapidly falling into
decay, stands a fourteen-story, pink granite and limestone tower—the
Sheraton La Guardia East Hotel—which is Taiwanese owned. Such a
sight in downtown Flushing would have been unimaginable in the early
1970s. In the immediate vicinity of the subway station, upscale Chinese
restaurants and full-service supermarkets, interspersed with small cafés,
green grocers, drugstores, and fast-food restaurants, give the area an
unmistakable look and feel of Chinatown. But it is not quite a new Chi-
natown. There are modern office complexes that house banks and ser-
vice-oriented firms owned by Taiwanese immigrants and transnational
Taiwanese, as well as subsidiary firms from the Asian Pacific. The
commercial core is also filled with Korean, Indian, Pakistani, and Bangla-
deshi restaurants and stores, packed into the shop fronts along the main
streets. The expanded downtown is now a bustling, vibrant commer-
cial area.

Suburban Chinese come to the neighborhood for multiple purposes.
For example, many Chinese families come from the outer suburbs to
bring their children to the Chinese language schools and other tutoring
and recreational facilities for Saturday afternoon language classes and
recreation. While children engage in these activities, their parents usu-
ally shop at the local grocery and specialty shops. Others come to Flus-
ing to study or browse at the crowded public library that possesses books,
magazines, and newspapers in different Asian languages, staying after-
ward to do some shopping and, perhaps, to eat at one of the many eth-
nic restaurants. The development of Flushing as a comprehensive ethnic
business center means that suburban Chinese residents no longer have
to go into the Manhattan Chinatown to visit a restaurant, do their shop-
ning, or satisfy their need for Chinese cultural activities.

Some of our respondents describe what has happened as the “Flush-
ing miracle,” in which a once struggling neighborhood has been revived
economically with capital imported from Asia and with the entrepre-
nerial spirit and hard work of Asian immigrants. Ethnic entrepreneurs,
however, tend to attribute the boom in ethnic enterprises to persistent
attempts to achieve the American dream and the cultural fear of losing
face. Aside from cultural norms, investment in Flushing is continually
being stimulated by the prospect of a growing Asian community, which
in turn perpetuates confidence in the neighborhood and ensures further
population growth.

Political Participation
Historically, Chinese immigrants were denied the right to become nat-
uralized citizens and were thus indifferent to politics. Much of the po-
itical activity in Chinatowns across the nation was oriented either to-
ward the homeland or toward the defense of ethnically defined interests
within the immigrant community. New York City had a segmented po-
itical system that was organized along ethnic lines and was used as a ve-
cicle for the expression of ethnic interests (Waldinger and Tseng 1992).
Because of their small numbers, early immigrant Chinese were not only
economically marginalized and socially isolated, they were hardly visible
in local politics.

In recent years, more and more immigrant Chinese have become nat-
uralized citizens and have become more active in local politics than ever
before. In Flushing, immigrant Chinese have formed various civic or-
ganizations serving multiethnic interests in the local community rather
than narrowly defined ethnic interests. These new ethnic organizations
work with other ethnic organizations in the neighborhood to mediate
intergroup misunderstandings and conflicts. They also routinely mobi-
alyze local business owners and residents to participate in civic activities,
such as street-cleaning campaigns, voter registration drives, and lobby-
ing the Community Board and city hall on urgent neighborhood issues.
However, the scale and the effectiveness of Chinese immigrants’ partic-
ipation in local politics have remained limited. For example, the elec-
toral numbers in the Twentieth Council District are far from favoring
Asian challengers. In 1990, Asians made up almost a third of Flushing’s
population but only 7 percent of registered voters. Councilwoman Har-
rison was twice challenged by Asian-American candidates. But she won
both elections in the 1990s, even though she was depicted as an “anti-
Asian bigot,” publicly referring to the influx of Asian immigrants and
Asian-owned businesses as an “invasion” and making a calculated effort
to gather white voter support by attacking the Asian immigrant com-
community (Dugger 1996; Li, 1996). Now that Asians make up the major-
ity in Flushing, their increasing political participation and power will be
predictably stronger in the years to come.

MONTEREY PARK: A GLOBAL CITY
IN AN AMERICAN SUBURB

A Suburb by a Large City

Unlike Flushing, which is an urban neighborhood toward the outskirts
of a large city, Monterey Park is an incorporated suburban municipality
with its own elected city council. 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 (Fong 1994). In the early days, 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 the vacancy rate was about 5 percent.

Beginning in the early 1970s, newcomers and foreign capital from Taiwan brought drastic changes to Monterey Park. In contrast to the tradition of immigrants starting out from the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder, many wealthy Taiwanese investors poured money into the suburb's real estate development and lured wealthy immigrants from Taiwan and potential emigrants in Taiwan to buy into the best neighborhoods immediately upon arrival or even prior to their arrival (Tseng 1994). As more Taiwanese immigrants arrived in the 1980s, housing prices increased with a clear surge in both residential and commercial construction. Huge luxurious homes were built on joint lots alongside multiple-family apartments and condominiums. The total number of housing units in the city jumped from 12,833 in 1960 to 19,331 in 1980. Median housing value in 1990 was $238,800. The proportion of multi-unit apartments (ten units or more) also jumped from 5 percent in 1960 to 14 percent in 1990; and the proportion of owner-occupied housing decreased from 65 percent in 1960 to 55 percent in 1990.

Commercial development in Monterey Park also experienced drastic changes beginning in the early 1980s, with the arrival of many Taiwanese realtors, developers, investors, entrepreneurs, and, later, the mainland Chinese nouveaux riches. These wealthy immigrants and transnationals played a crucial role in reinvigorating a formerly inactive economy and boosting real estate values. In many cases, profits were not the focus. Many investors and entrepreneurs were willing to take losses to secure a place in the United States. Opening businesses and establishing settlement enabled Chinese newcomers to obtain immigrant visas or certain types of nonimmigrant visas that could later be adjusted to permanent residency. The heavy infusion of foreign capital investment, rapid economic growth, and sudden influx of affluent immigrants from Taiwan and mainland China stirred up the once tranquil bedroom community, transforming it into a cosmopolitan hub of the Asian Pacific where property prices skyrocketed and various Chinese-owned businesses sprang up along main streets with discernible Chinese-language signs, replacing old and familiar diners and specialty shops.

Demographic Transformation

Like Flushing, postwar Monterey Park was predominantly non-Hispanic white. But due to its cozy middle-class suburban atmosphere and proximity to downtown Los Angeles, Monterey Park, in the 1950s, began to draw upwardly mobile Mexican-Americans from neighboring East Los Angeles, Japanese-Americans from the Westside, and Chinese-Americans from Chinatown (Fong 1994; Horton 1993). By 1960, Monterey Park's ethnic makeup was 85 percent non-Hispanic white (down from 99.9 percent in 1950), 12 percent Latino, 2.9 percent Asian, and 1.1 percent black. Many of the Latinos 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, Latinos and Asian-Americans were well represented in the community (34 percent and 13 percent, respectively), yet Anglos were still a majority (50.5 percent). The process of ethnic integration was fairly smooth, since the new residents were mostly acculturated second- or third-generation members of ethnic minorities and were not perceived as a threat to existing Anglo political and institutional dominance (Horton 1993).

Drastic demographic change, however, was set off by the arrival of immigrants and investors from Taiwan and the Pacific Rim and an influx of foreign capital. By the mid-1980s, the city had been transformed from an Anglo bedroom town into a cosmopolitan city with an Asian majority, a visible presence of immigrant Chinese, and a vibrant ethnic economy. As shown in figure 4.7, non-Hispanic white residents declined rapidly from 51 percent in 1970 to 26 percent in 1980 and to just 7 percent in 1990. In contrast, the proportion of Asian residents increased from less than 1 percent in 1970 to 34 percent in 1980 and 62 percent in 2000. By 2000, Monterey Park was one of five California cities with an Asian majority (see table 4.2). Two of the others, Cerritos and Walnut, were also east of the city of Los Angeles. Rowland Heights, which is near Walnut and is a “census designated place” rather than city, is 50 percent Asian (fig. 4.2).

The majority of Monterey Park's Asian-Americans are of Chinese ancestry (67 percent), and the rest include U.S.-born Japanese-Americans (12 percent) and other immigrants from Southeast Asia, such as Vietnamese (8 percent). In 1980, 31 percent of the Monterey Park population was foreign born, in 1990 increasing to 51 percent. Not surprisingly, 73 percent of those in Monterey Park spoke a language other than English at home as of 1990.
migrants is 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—“spacemen” as the media calls them—have settled their wives and children in Monterey Park while shuttling back and forth between both sides of the Pacific Ocean (Fong 1994). And in other cases, the children—known as “parachute kids”—are left in the United States alone to obtain an education, while both parents remain in Asia (M. Zhou 1998). Transnational household arrangements have become 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 Latinos or Asian-Americans, the new Chinese immigrants inserted themselves directly into the middle-class suburb without much acculturation.

**Development of Ethnic and Transnational Economies**

In the 1960s, a few small specialty shops, supermarkets, and restaurants dominated commercial activities in Monterey Park. At night, streets were quiet as residents retired to their comfortable homes. A former police chief recalled, “You could shoot a cannon off at Atlantic and Garvey, and it could fly through the air and roll to a stop without hitting a soul” (quoted in Arax 1987, 1). Today, Chinese-owned supermarkets and mini-malls have replaced this small-town commercial core with various stores and restaurants that have become part of a greater commercial hub for ethnic and transnational businesses. The vibrant commercial center expands block after block and is active from early in the morning till late at night, seven days a week. As a resident recalled, “At 3:30 in the morning...I counted 34 cars stopped at a red light at Atlantic and Garvey [one of the main intersections]. It looked like rush hour” (quoted in Arax 1987, 1).

The Chinese ethnic economy in Monterey Park cannot be measured in traditional terms. While many Chinese-owned businesses still resemble those in Chinatowns—such as mom-and-pop or husband-wife restaurants, gift shops, food stores, and other small-scale services, newly created business establishments are bigger and more Westernized. Many of them are upgraded and improved through combinations of ethnic and Western skills to sell Asian products and services. The pace of these capital flows accelerated in the following decade as Hong Kong, China, and Southeast Asia started to transfer capital to the United States. Another important source of economic development has been the family assets and savings that immigrants brought to their new country.
Real estate development is perhaps Monterey Park’s most notable economic activity. Foreign capital has been channeled into the community by Chinese-owned banks and financial institutions, as well as by individual family savings. 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 development had an Asian face, and the economic boom responded mainly to the demands of coethnic immigrants (Horton 1995). Investors from Taiwan targeted the place because of its growth potential and its convenient location—accessible to Chinatown and to the Pacific Rim. With sufficient capital, these investors bought up properties and converted or developed them into a wide array of housing: residential housing ranged from luxury homes and condominiums to high-density apartment complexes and commercial developments focused on mini-malls. By the late 1980s, few vacant lots were available, and the price of land skyrocketed. Many lots for commercial development sold at $40–$50 per square foot, much higher than the price of $8–$10 per square foot that supermarkets or department stores could afford to pay. With these inflated prices, developers had to recoup their costs through intensive development—building smaller and denser mini-malls and office buildings. As a result, Monterey Park has also become a commercial and banking hub for an even bigger Chinese community that resides in San Marino, Arcadia, and throughout the San Gabriel Valley.

The proliferation of commercial development in Monterey Park, however, has gone far beyond the city’s geographic boundaries, mirroring a new trend of Chinese immigrant settlement in Los Angeles. Unlike New York’s Chinese-owned businesses, which are concentrated in Chinatown, Flushing, and Sunset Park, Los Angeles’s Chinese-owned businesses are as spread out as the ethnic population. As of 1992, there were about 11,000 Chinese-owned firms in Los Angeles. About 12 percent were located in Monterey Park and another third in neighboring cities in the San Gabriel Valley. Nonetheless, the ethnic economy in Los Angeles’s eastern suburb plays a pivotal role in the local economy as well as in the economic adaptation of Chinese immigrants. According to Yenfeng Tseng (1994), the new ethnic economy was highly diversified and transnational, with operations ranging from franchised American-style supermarkets to banks and accounting firms.

Monterey Park and its neighboring cities have become producer service centers for Chinese businesses and a hub for cross-cultural and transnational business services (Tseng 1994; Li 1997; Y. Zhou 1998).

Much of the economic growth is linked to economic development in the Pacific Rim.

**Political Participation**

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 non-Hispanic white Republican professionals and businessmen (Horton 1995). 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. The addition of Chinese immigrants tipped the power balance and transformed local politics into the politics of diversity (Horton 1995).

In the 1980s, some Democrats showed varied levels of willingness to adapt the city’s institutions to suit new immigrants and minorities, while others sided with conservatives against the Chinese newcomers. However, when immigrants with strong economic resources form a numerical majority, city politicians cannot possibly ignore them. The shrinking non-Hispanic white population along with the decreasing influence of the old white conservative elite have created an opportunity for young multiethnic businessmen, minorities, immigrants, women, and multiculturals, as well as nativists, to engage in politics, opening up a new political order in Monterey Park (Horton 1995).

In 1983 when Lily Lee Chen, a Chinese-American, was inaugurated as mayor, Monterey Park’s five-member city council was truly multiethnic with one non-Hispanic white, two Mexican-American, one Filipino-American, and one Chinese-American. 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 of the city council members were replaced by long established non-Hispanic white residents, returning the city council to white control in pursuit of anti-immigrant campaigns under the name of the defender of Americanism: “English, the family, God, the nation, and the neighborhood” (Horton 1995, 95). Backlash against ethnic politics in the mid-1980s was short-lived, however, as more and more immigrant Chinese became naturalized citizens and were mobilized into participation in local politics. In 1988, Judy Chu, a Chinese-American was elected to the city council, was reelected to serve on the city council until 2001, and was elected mayor of Monterey Park three times. In 1990, Samuel Kang, a China-born naturalized citizen, was elected to the
city council. As of 2001, two of the city’s elected officials were Chinese-American (a council member and the city treasurer), but only one of the ten appointed officials was Chinese-American.

Most recently, however, there was another severe setback for Chinese-American political participation. In 1999, all four Chinese-American candidates out of eleven candidates on the ballot lost their bids for the three city council seats for which they were vying. Again in 2001, all five Chinese-American candidates (one withdrew before Election Day) out of seven candidates on the ballot lost their bids for the one city council seat that was open. Even though none of the Chinese-American candidates won city council seats in the 1999 and 2000 elections in Monterey Park, the latest electoral politics indicated the greater political maturity of Monterey Park’s Chinese-American community. Despite the current losses, Chinese-Americans in Monterey Park are using their increasing demographic presence and electoral and economic power to challenge traditional Anglo domination in the city council. Today, the Asian constituency extends beyond Monterey Park to other Chinese communities in the San Gabriel Valley and recognizes the election of a Chinese or Asian candidate as supporting the overall “development of Chinese- and Asian-American power in Los Angeles, California and the United States” (Horton 1995, 108). The formation of the West San Gabriel Valley Asian Pacific Democratic Club and the burgeoning of immigrant political organizations in the 1980s has further strengthened Chinese-Americans’ political power base. Judy Chu’s successful bid for the Forty-ninth District seat of the California State Assembly in 2001 signifies the strengths of growing Asian-American political clout and multiethnic coalition.

CONCLUSION AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Monterey Park may be an outlier since there are so few cities in the United States where Asian-Americans constitute a majority and where Chinese immigrants make up such a significant part of that majority. However, middle-class immigrant Chinese communities are growing rapidly and visibly not only in New York and Los Angeles but also in San Francisco, San Jose, Boston, Houston, and other major immigrant-receiving metropolitan areas. Similar developments are also evident in Toronto and Vancouver in Canada.

Broadly speaking, the two modern enclaves studied here, Flushing and Monterey Park, share certain common characteristics with older Chinatowns but are distinct from Chinatowns in many other ways; and they also differ from each other. Like Chinatowns, new middle-class immigrant communities serve those needs of new arrivals that are unmet in the mainstream society, and they provide opportunities for self-employment and employment.

But in both Flushing and Monterey Park, the pattern of ethnic succession is distinct from that of the past. Rather than an ethnic minority that arrives to bring down the average economic level of the populace, the incoming ethnic minority arrives with higher than average educational and economic resources and with the capability of creating its own ethnic economy. These communities are better connected to the outside world on economic, social, and political terms. Moreover, they can no longer be narrowly defined as the “ethnic enclave” or “staging places” just for the poor and the unacculturated.

Yet the social class composition of both Flushing and Monterey Park is fluid and dynamic. These communities were started by affluent immigrants, investors, and professionals; but as time goes by, the pioneers have begun to send for their relatives, who may not be as resourceful. Many family-sponsored immigrants, especially those from mainland China, are of urban working-class backgrounds, and most lack English language proficiency and transferable job skills. They have come to Monterey Park to join their families. Also, many low-skilled immigrant workers are drawn to Monterey Park because the expanding ethnic economy needs their labor and they can easily find housing through relatives and friends. As a result of interwoven ethnic ties, the Chinese populations in Flushing and Monterey Park are becoming more socioeconomically diverse. Such class diversity has implications for both immigrants and the native-born. For Chinese immigrants, class segmentation would mean greater social service burdens and a high risk of bearing a dual stigma—both foreigner and poor. As a way to avoid association with working-class coethnics, the more affluent Chinese immigrants are under pressure to migrate out further. Several immigrant Chinese business owners in Monterey Park that we interviewed told us that they had recently moved to avoid “overcrowdedness” and “gangs in schools.” Some newcomers even express a reluctance to settle in Monterey Park. A Chinese home buyer 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.” Interestingly, these feelings mirror those of established residents. For middle-class non-Hispanic whites, Latinos, and Asian-Americans alike, the influx of working-class immigrants may now mean a disruption of middle-class lifestyles and the threat of importing inner-city or Third World social problems.

Flushing and Monterey Park both have a strong ethnic economy that
goes beyond the traditional model of small business and, instead, follows a mixed model of “East meets West” development driven by the market and economic globalization. Rapid economic growth propelled by the influx of foreign capital and immigration creates opportunities but causes pains associated with soaring real estate prices, overcrowding, noise, traffic congestion, and crime. Some long-time residents in Flushing lamented that the new Flushing “looks like hell... It’s really a disaster. There is too much traffic, filth and chaos.” Monterey Park residents would echo these feelings. 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” (cited in Horton 1995, 10). Among established residents in Monterey Park, there is a deep-seated fear that their neighborhoods are turning into Chinatowns or microcosms of Taipei, Shanghai, or Hong Kong, which as they imagine are among the most crowded, congested, and polluted cities in the world. While established residents voice their concerns with a sense of nostalgia for small-town life and resentment to “Asian invasion,” more established Chinese immigrants also cite these problems as their primary reasons for leaving Monterey Park.

Also, Flushing and Monterey Park have become increasingly multi-ethnic, unlikely to be dominated by a single national-origin group. Diversity at the local level has made intraethnic and interethnic relations key community issues. The mixing of coethnics 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 members of different ethnic group members provides opportunity for intimate social contact but also garners potential tension. Flushing has not witnessed any explosive ethnic tensions. But when conflicts do surface, Flushing’s multiethnic immigrant groups may have relatively little solidarity to mobilize politically because the power of ethnic immigrants is fragmented in New York City’s huge political maelstrom. In contrast, conflicts are much more overt in Monterey Park, often focusing on growth control movements and English-only resolutions, but ethnic mobilization seems more effective because native-born Latinos and Asian-Americans tend to align with immigrant Chinese to act on racial issues in a city where minority groups form the numerical majority and political power is concentrated locally.

Tracing the development of Chinese immigrant settlement, we have seen that long-standing immigrant enclaves in the inner city seem to have absorbed the sheer numbers and the successive waves of immigrants fairly smoothly, and with largely salutary results, and that there are few substantive regional variations. In suburbia (or the outer boroughs in the case of New York), however, complacent “bedroom” communities have experienced widespread in-migration of middle-class immigrants and rapid economic growth, and the results have been confrontational. Recent suburban immigrant concentrations have tipped the suburban balance of power, raising nativist anxiety. In Flushing and Monterey Park, immigrants from Asia, no less than blacks and Latinos, can be perceived as a threat to non-Hispanic 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 (Horton 1995) and their notion of “Americanness.” As immigration continues into the twenty-first century with its long-lasting impacts on American cities, a reconceptualization of neighborhood change and residential mobility is much needed.
The study was partially supported by a research grant from the Asian American
Studies Center at the University of California, Los Angeles. Part of the research
on Flushing was a collaboration with Christopher Smith. We thank John Logan
and David Halle for their helpful comments and Amy Chai, Robert Gedon,
and Gihong Yi for their research assistance.

1. Throughout the text, the term “metropolitan area” refers to “principal
metropolitan statistical area” (PMSA), and the term “region” refers to “con-
solidated metropolitan statistical area” (CMSA). The New York PMSA includes
the five counties of New York City plus Putnam, Rockland, and Westchester
Counties. The Los Angeles–Long Beach PMSA consists of Los Angeles County.
The New York and Los Angeles CMSAs are defined in fig. 1.1.

2. The Chinese-American population was 3.5 percent of the total popula-
tion in the Los Angeles-Long Beach PMSA (Los Angeles County) and 4.1 in
the New York-New York PMSA in 2000. In the Los Angeles region (CMSA),
there are eleven suburban municipalities with a high concentration of Chinese-
American population.

3. Flushing in this chapter refers to the core area in central or downtown Flus-
thing, which is officially defined by the Queen's Community Board number 7 as
an area including eleven contiguous census tracts in the 1980, 1990, and 2000
censuses: 797, 845, 851, 853, 855, 857, 859, 865, 867, 871, and 875. California’s Mo-
terey Park in 1980 includes eleven tracts: 5104, 4817.01, 4817.02, 4820.01,
4820.02, 4821.01, 4821.02, 4822, 4826, 4827, and 4828; in 1990, thirteen tracts:
4817.02, 4817.11, 4817.12, 4820.01, 4820.02, 4821.01, 4821.02, 4822.01, 4822.02,
4826, 4827, 4828, and 5104; and in 2000, fifteen tracts: 4817.11, 4817.12, 4817.13,
4817.14, 4820.01, 4820.02, 4821.01, 4821.02, 4822.01, 4822.02, 4826, 4827.01,
4827.02, 4828, and 5104. New York’s Chinatown in 1980, 1990, and 2000 in-
cludes fourteen tracts—seven in the core area (6, 8, 16, 18, 27, 29, and 41) and
seven in the extended area (2.01, 2.02, 14.02, 22.01, 43, 15.01, and 25 [Zhou
1992]). Los Angeles’s Chinatown in 2000 includes six tracts—two in the core
area (1977 and 2071) and four in the extended area (1971, 1972, 1973, and 1976
[census tract number 1971.10 was number 1971 in 1990, and tract number 2072
was part of Chinatown in 1980]). Flushing and Monterey Park differ drastically
in area but are similar in population size (55,339 vs. 62,217 in 2000), whereas the
population size in New York's Chinatown is larger in area and nearly four times
as large as that in Los Angeles's Chinatown (95,330 vs. 25,082 in 2000).


5. Mayors are not elected in Monterey Park. Instead, council members be-
come mayors for nine months on a rotating basis. Thus, Lily Lee Chen was not
only the mayor but also the one Chinese-American member of the council.

6. The Forty-ninth District is a southern California electoral district that in-
cludes Monterey Park, Alhambra, Rosemead, San Gabriel, El Sereno, and City
Terrace parts of East Los Angeles.

7. Interview with a Chinese immigrant by Min Zhou at a real estate agency

8. Interview with two elderly white homeowners by Min Zhou, Flushing,
N.Y., May 1993.