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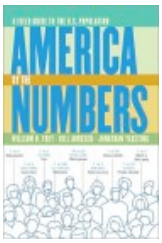


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# Ethnic Communities & Enclaves

**Immigration is a major component in the lives of many Asian Americans -- why they come, how many, and what happens to them after they arrive. Since the establishment of the first Asian American communities in the U.S., Asian American "enclaves" have become a significant part of virtually every major city in America. As more Asians immigrate to the U.S., traditional communities not only grow but also evolve as they absorb the new arrivals and adapt to the non-Asian environment around them. This section looks at the numbers of immigrants who come to the U.S. and economic and cultural issues that affect these communities.**

## STATISTICS, ANYONE?

Before we explore the origins and dynamics of ethnic enclaves and communities, you may be wondering, considering that about two-thirds of all Asian Americans are immigrants, exactly how many Asians have immigrated to the U.S.? Well I'm glad you asked. Below is a table compiled from Immigration and Naturalization Service data.

It shows the number of immigrants and refugees/asylees who have arrived in the U.S. for the six largest Asian origin countries, plus Hong Kong (remember, before 2000, Hong Kong was a colony of Great Britain) and all Asian countries combined, for each of the past three decades plus the latest year in which final numbers are available, 2000. Finally, it includes numbers from Europe, the Caribbean, Central and South America, and Mexico for comparison.

| | # of Immigrants, Refugees, & Asylees | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1971-1980 | 1981-1990 | 1991-2000 | 2001-2004 |
| China | 138,068 | 354,675 | 426,722 | 212,724 |
| Hong Kong | 116,935 | 100,131 | 110,390 | 30,336 |
| India | 164,175 | 250,786 | 365,604 | 267,081 |
| Japan | 49,831 | 47,195 | 67,966 | 31,628 |
| Korea | 267,703 | 333,866 | 164,192 | 74,055 |
| Philippines | 355,200 | 548,764 | 509,913 | 207,908 |
| Viet Nam | 323,086 | 605,235 | 493,002 | 144,494 |

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| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **All Asian Countries** | 1,798,861 | 3,450,249 | 3,147,019 | 1,332,264 |
| **All European Countries** | 872,226 | 917,062 | 1,786,302 | 738,898 |
| **Caribbean, Central & South America** | 1,424,865 | 1,924,312 | 2,236,032 | 971,635 |
| **Mexico** | 640,496 | 1,655,843 | 2,249,837 | 717,408 |

As you can see, the Asian ethnic group that has sent the most immigrants to the U.S. since 1971 are the Philippines (over 1.5 million since 1971), followed by India, Korea, and Viet Nam (all around 3/4 of a million). However, these numbers pale in comparison to the number of immigrants from Mexico, who total over 4.5 million since 1971 -- wow! The U.S. is truly the land of immigrants. Before we discuss the socioeconomic and cultural characteristics and impacts of Asian immigrants, let us examine how they've formed their own ethnic communities after arriving in the U.S.

## THE ORIGINS OF ASIAN AMERICAN ENCLAVES

As I described earlier, the first Asian American enclave (I use "enclave" and "community" interchangeably) were not Chinatowns but were actually Manila Villages in Louisiana in the 1750s. But the Chinatowns that developed as increasing numbers of Chinese workers came to northern California and Hawai'i in the mid-1800s expanded the scale of such enclaves to a whole new level. As the Chinese population spread to other parts of the country, new Chinatowns spread to other major cities, such as New York City, Los Angeles, and Chicago.

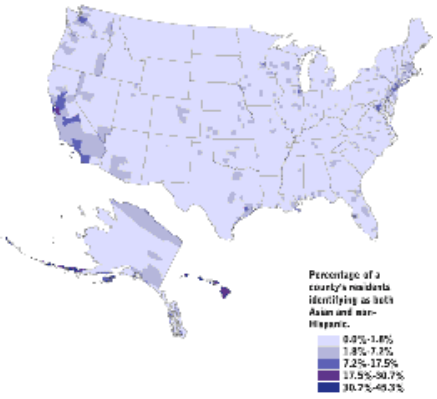
But after Chinese immigration was all but stopped in the 1880s, the Japanese then followed in the steps of the Chinese and "Little Tokyos" began cropping up, first in Hawai'i, San Francisco and then in Los Angeles. As the Japanese mainly worked in agriculture, they became drawn to the relatively undeveloped land and abundant farming opportunities in southern California. Since this period in the early 1900s, a few small Asian American communities existed throughout the country but they were relatively unnoticed for the most part.

However, as we discussed in the section on the new wave of Asian immigration, it was not until the **1965 Hart-Cellar Immigration Act** that the structure of Asian American enclaves changed radically. With the influx of new immigrants from China, the Philippines, Korea, India/South Asia, and Viet Nam, almost overnight new ethnic enclaves became established and quickly grew in size, almost exponentially. New enclaves soon appeared in several major U.S. cities while existing ones expanded rapidly.

Soon there were Koreatowns in Los Angeles and New York, Little Manilas in Los Angeles and San Francisco, South Asian enclaves in New York, and Little Saigons in Orange

County (CA), San Jose, and Houston. By the mid-1980s, the existing Chinatown in Manhattan grew so much that there wasn't any more land into which it could expand so new Chinatowns sprang up in Sunset Park, Brooklyn and Flushing, Queens.

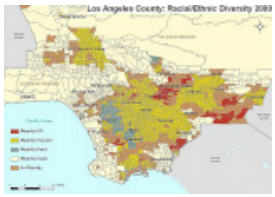
Today, you could find an Asian American enclave in almost every major metropolitan area you go. Some may even be in place where you would never expect, such as a thriving Hmong community in Minneapolis/St. Paul. There are also expanding Asian communities in many Canadian cities, in particular Toronto and Vancouver. Each Asian community offers its own mix of traditional culture and cuisine along with new elements borrowed from its surrounding community.




The map on the right comes from CensusScope/Social Science Data Analysis Network and it shows Asian Americans as a **percentage** of a county's total population from the 2000 census. Click on the thumbnail to see the larger version in a new window. What it basically shows, not surprisingly, is that the counties that have the largest proportion of their population as Asian American are located in California, Washington, and along the mid-Atlantic and New England states. However, there is also a scattering of counties in the midwest and Texas that, while not huge, have a notable proportion of their population as Asian as well.

To look in more detail at perhaps the most dynamic county in the U.S. in terms of racial/ethnic diveristy, below are maps compiled by Michela Zonta and Paul Ong at the Ralph & Goldy Lewis Center for Regional Policy Analysis at UCLA. They illustrate different racial/ethnic distributions and concentrations in cities within Los Angeles County for 1980, 1990, and 2000. Click on each map's thumbnail below to see a full-size picture in a pop-up window. The results show that in 1980, the only cities that had an Asian Pacific Islander (API) majority were ones directly north of downtown and in east L.A. However, by 1990, more API majorities sprung up in east L.A. and west of Compton. Most recently in 2000, API majorities have expanded to include most of east L.A. and San Gabriel and much of the eastern part of the county.





## WHY THESE ENCLAVES ARE SO POPULAR

Sociologists and other social scientists note many reasons why these ethnic enclaves are so popular with new immigrants and Asian Americans who have lived in the U.S. all their lives. They actually have different definitions for an ethnic "community" versus an

ethnic "enclave." Without getting into the academic details too much, enclaves are ethnic communities that have a well-developed economic structure that operates mainly through racial/ethnic dynamics.

At any rate, we will discuss the issue of Asian American small businesses in another section. For now, we'll focus on how these ethnic enclaves grew so quickly and why they continue to thrive. In one word, it's because of immigration. Immigrants from Asia keep coming to these ethnic communities and infuse them with new life.

There are many theories on **why people immigrate to the U.S.**, especially from Asian countries. Again, without getting too academic, the usual scenario goes something like this: American multinational corporations set up businesses in foreign countries and soon begin to dominate that country's politics and economy. This "globalization of capital" disrupts and transforms the traditional way people in these Asian countries make a living as the fundamental structure of their national economy changes from one dominated by farming and agriculture to the beginnings of a modern capitalist economy that emphasizes manufacturing and export sectors.

Many workers struggle to survive economically, to adapt to these rapid changes, and many become "displaced" (i.e., they lose their jobs or their land, etc.). Nonetheless, having already been exposed to U.S. culture, either through direct contact with those connected to the American businesses now operating in their country or through TV programs and U.S. media portrayals, many workers dream about working in U.S. and earning lots of money. Their expectations for "the good life" become heightened but they also realize that they can't achieve these new goals in their current situation. They also see that by working in the U.S. and earning more money, they can help out other family members who have also been displaced.

In the meantime, companies in the U.S. are looking to hire immigrant workers who are frequently willing work for lower wages than U.S.-born workers. Many times, these companies actively recruit foreign workers to come to the U.S. Further, earlier immigrants from that country help in the immigration process by providing helpful information about jobs or assistance in the actual immigration and adjustment process. After this initial cycles, immigration becomes almost self-perpetuating through these established social networks as immigrant workers repeat the cycle of helping their family, relatives, and friends come to the U.S. to find work.

Once these Asian immigrants get to the U.S., they frequently end up living or working in these established Asian enclaves. This makes sense because these enclaves give them a sense of familiarity and emotional comfort, which makes it easier for them to adapt to life in the U.S. They also are more likely to get a job in the enclave, especially if they are not fluent enough in English to get a job outside the enclave. Being employed also helps them adjust to their new life in the U.S.

Finally, these new workers help these small ethnic businesses survive and even prosper, perhaps to the point where they can contribute to the local economy in the form of taxes and hiring more workers, Asian and non-Asian. In the meantime, non-Asians are able to learn about and enjoy the rich Asian culture and food of these enclaves. These new understandings and friendships can form the bridge that helps us to overcome the old suspicions of "us" versus "them" and that immigrants can be Americans too.


At the same time, many point out that not everything is always quite so rosy for these Asian immigrant workers. They argue that many Asian business owners are more than willing to **exploit** the relative powerlessness of these new immigrants and their willingness to accept lower wages and less-than-optimum working conditions. Specifically, many Asian-owned **sweatshops**, restaurants, and other small businesses have been accused of taking advantage of their own people in this manner for their own financial gain.

In fact, many Asian American non-profit community organizations beame established to protest against these exploitative conditions by picketing Asian small businesses and pressuring their owners to improve working conditions and wages, and by trying to unionize these immigrant workers. Academic research also shows that working within an ethnic enclave is frequently beneficial for Asian business owners but not for their workers who may be able to earn more and enjoy slightly better working conditions in jobs outside the ethnic enclave.

On the other hand, other scholars argue that while immigrant workers in ethnic enclaves may be slightly 'penalized' in terms of wages and working conditions, they benefit in other ways. Specifically, they enjoy the pyschological familiarity and comfort of being surrounded by others like them as they adapt to a strange new society. They also learn the ins and outs of running a small business and in fact, many workers eventually go on to opening up their own small businesses, sometimes by buying the business from their former owners.

In short, while there are some disadvantages for workers in the ethnic enclave, the fact remains that Asian ethnic communities have the enormous potential to benefit everyone involved -- new immigrants, established Asian Americans, the local non-Asian community, and American society as a whole.

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