10

The Paradox of Ethnicization and Assimilation: The Development of Ethnic Organizations in the Chinese Immigrant Community in the United States[1]

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The Chinese immigrant community has gone through several significant historical periods since the late 1840s: unrestricted immigration (1848–81), Chinese exclusion (1882–1943), immigration on restricted quotas (1944–67), and immigration on equal basis (1968–present). During each historical period, unique patterns of socio-economic adaptation and community development have affected the preservation of Chineseness and the construction of Chinese-American ethnicity. This chapter aims to illuminate the processes of ethnicization and assimilation through the story of immigrant community development in the United States. We specifically examine (1) how broad structural forces shape the formation and development of ethnic organizations in each historical period of Chinese immigration, (2) what new ethnic organizations are like and how they align with traditional organizations to influence immigrant adaptation, and (3) how ethnic organizations affect identity and assimilation. Drawing on past studies and our own research of the contemporary Chinese immigrant community in the United States,[2] we focus on how internal community dynamics, intermixed with macro-structural factors, influence the mobility and identity of Chinese immigrants and their offspring. In so doing, we seek to offer a fresh approach to the classic sociological inquiry of ethnicity and assimilation in American life.

Immigration and Community Development

Unrestricted labor migration and restricted social life

The process of community development has been shaped by macro-structural forces in the sending and receiving countries (Chan 1986; McCunn 1979; Skinner 1971). Chinese immigrants who arrived in the United States during the period of unrestricted migration (1848–81) were mostly peasants from the rural Sze Yap region of south China.[3] Driven by overpopulation and

poverty at home, the labor demand of Western expansion in America, and an ethnic network of overseas merchants, many Sze Yap villagers were lured into the contract labor, or "coolie" (which literally means "bitter strength"), trade. Poverty-stricken and illiterate, immigrants could barely afford to pay trans-Pacific passage fees, nor were they able to sign mutually agreed-upon contracts, and so relied almost entirely on co-ethnic labor brokers and a tightly and exclusively organized credit-ticket system to make it to the United States (Barth 1964). Under this credit system, emigrants could enter labor contracts with brokers, who dealt with Western sailing vessels to arrange for their journey. The contracts bound the laborers, who were expected to repay a certain proportion of their wages or to work a certain length of time once they were in the United States. Few emigrants realized the amount of debt they incurred from the credit-ticket system. This form of contract labor was often described by the Cantonese as the "selling of pigs" or the "pig trade" (Kwong 1997; Zhou 1992). About 41,000 Chinese arrived in the United States in this way between 1851and 1860. Upon arrival, they were sent to work in various gold fields in the Sierra Nevada foothills. The 1860 US census recorded that almost all Chinese immigration to the United States was concentrated in California, and within the state, eighty-four percent settled in mining counties (Chan 1991). In the late 1860s, the Central Pacific Company started to recruit Chinese miners, as well as new contract laborers from China, to work on the western section of the first continental railroad. During the 1860s, 64,000 more Chinese arrived in the United States (USINS 1986, Table 2), andabout 40,000 coming between 1867 and 1870 (Chan 1991).

Laboring in mines and railroad construction sites was extremely difficult. In a foreign country away from their home and loved ones, Chinese laborers were subject to heavy debts and head taxes, harsh working conditions, racial prejudice and discrimination, and a restricted and controlled social life. In work camps, Chinese laborers were isolated from white workers, and clustered around a small class of co-ethnic merchants, who opened stores wherever their compatriots congregated. These ethnic stores not only provided familiar, culturally specific goods, ranging from imported ethnic foods, clothing, herbal medicines, tobacco and liquor to opium, but also served as places where the socially isolated sojourners gathered. Such merchants also acted as transnational liaisons, bringing news about home to warm the lonely hearts of those sojourning in a foreign land, and about America, to comfort the anxious relatives left behind; they also acted as labor brokers to help displaced Chinese miners and railroad workers find work in urban areas and to facilitate secondary migration to those areas. As time went by, they became important figures in work camps, and their stores often served as sites for informal organization. However, ethnic organizations had not taken shape. It was the co-ethnic merchants who directly or indirectly shaped the lives of earlier Chinese immigrants in mines and work camps and gradually became

immersed in the power structure of the evolving Chinese immigrant community in the period of Chinese exclusion.

Chinese exclusion and the rise of Chinatown

Early Chinese immigrants found themselves easy targets for discrimination and exclusion. Not only did their significant contribution to building the most difficult part of the transcontinental road west of the Rockies go unrecognized, but the mere existence of Chinese immigrant labor became a nuisance when the work was finished. Poor economic conditions, a well-developed racist ideology, and well-organized native workers stirred ethnic conflict in the 1870s. Chinese immigrant workers were accused of building "a filthy nest of iniquity and rottenness" and driving away white labor by their "stealthy" competition, and were referred to as the "Chinese menace" and the "indispensable enemy" (McCunn 1979; Saxton 1971). Rallying under the slogan "The Chinese Must Go!" the Workmen's Party in California launched an anti-Chinese campaign for laws to exclude the Chinese, leading to the passage of the *Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882* (Saxton 1971). This act was the first of its kind, excluding an entire group on the basis of race alone. It was later extended to exclude all Asian immigrants until World War II.

Faced with legal and institutional exclusion, Chinatowns were built as places of refuge that resembled the Chinese immigrants' homeland. Having few options and numerous barriers, Chinese immigrants clung to one another for social and economic support. As the ethnic community took root in American soil, various ethnic organizations emerged to assist the excluded Chinese laborers. Three major types of organizations were dominant in Chinatowns in America under Chinese exclusion: family, district, and merchant associations (Lyman 1974; Kuo 1977; Kwong 1987; Lee 1960; Wong 1988).

Family or clan ties were always strong among Chinese laborers, because most of the workers were recruited and organized by place of origin; but they remained uninstitutionalized until the late nineteenth century. Rooted in Chinatowns, family associations sprang up to provide mutual assistance and protection among compatriots. Based on combinations of common surname, ancestral descent, and village of origin, family associations in America functioned like extended families. They varied in size, ranging from associations with 20 to 100 members to larger multi-family associations with 100 to 10,000 members (Kuo 1977; Wong 1988). Initially serving as mutual aid societies, providing housing and helping with emotional and employment issues, family associations later expanded to provide credit and financing through informal credit clubs, or *hui*.

Like family associations, district associations *(hui guan)* also served as

mutual aid societies to provide assistance to compatriots and to articulate specific group interests within the ethnic community. Unlike family associations, however, district associations recruited members not only on the basis of common surname or kinship but also on the basis of common dialect and common region of origin. They were open to both those who were already members of family associations and to those who were not, such as those who came from smaller surname groups, villages, or districts with weak membership bases. District associations played an important role in providing economic and social support to immigrants, by offering employment-related services, translating and filling in paperwork for business licenses, and settling business disputes (Wong 1988). They also preserved and expressed cultural rituals and protected their members from threats from different factions of Chinatown and from the larger society.

Unlike family or district associations, merchant associations, also called tongs, functioned as "brotherhoods" or "secret societies." Tong members were unrelated by blood, surname, ancestral descent, or place of origin. They pledged allegiance to one another as "brothers in blood oath." Through secret language and mystical religious rituals, members of tongs were solidified by codes of loyalty and pledges to revenge any offense committed by outsiders against one of their own members (Chin 1996; Kwong 1987). They were expected to become brave soldiers and prove their "toughness" before they could take on leadership positions. Each *tong* had a highly unified military force, as violence was accepted as necessary for self-defense. Most family or district associations had fighters to defend their economic and political interests, but only the tongs had the "distinct advantage" of secret membership. Through the "element of surprise," the tongs exerted tremendous power in the ethnic community (Kwong 1987: 98). As result, many family and district associations developed formal or informal ties to *tongs* for insurance and greater protection.

As a result of intricate ties to family and district associations, *tongs* had greater finances, larger memberships, and fiercer soldiers than other associations — operating under both the legitimate and illegitimate layers of social order (Chin 1996). On the one hand, they acted legitimately as a powerful organization that controlled the internal affairs of Chinatowns ensuring community solidarity and security and protecting the Chinese from violence and hostility in the larger society. On the other hand, they illegally dictated which streets belonged to whom and who was permitted to operate what types of illegal operations (Kwong 1987). *Tongs* commonly fought over economic and territorial control in Chinatown and were known for using underhanded methods of violence like threats, blackmail, slander, and extortion (Lee 1960). Well connected to international networks, the tongs also engaged in illicit businesses like prostitution, gambling, narcotics, and human smuggling, especially during the period of Chinese exclusion (Chin

1996). Recognizing their clout, business owners joined *tongs* to protect their economic interests, while the majority of individual workers such as waiters, laborers, laundrymen, store clerks, and seamen joined for protection against possible attacks from anti-Chinese gangs and mobs (Chin 1996).

Social and legal discrimination from the larger society and increasing inter-association conflicts within the Chinese immigrant community eventually pressed the various associations to unite in the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association (CCBA, originally the Chinese Six Companies) as an umbrella institution in San Francisco and New York, with chapters in other cities. The CCBA functioned as an overarching "inner government" federating existing family, district, and merchant associations under a unified leadership and monopolizing key community businesses. It also controlled social behavior, mediated internal conflicts, and negotiated with the outside world for the benefit of the community (Kuo 1977; Salyer 1995; Wong 1988). The CCBA maintained strong political ties to the nationalist Kuomintang (KMT) government, which in turn set up an Overseas Affairs Bureau in Chinatowns to cultivate relations with the influential, wealthy élite and gain support from the ethnic community in America.

Chinese language schools were also an integral part of Chinatown's organizational structure. Early Chinese schools, taught in Cantonese, were informal one-room operations that improved basic Chinese literacy for early Chinese immigrants and helped their children learn the Chinese language and culture. During the period of exclusion, most of Chinatown's children enrolled in Chinese language schools. Formal Chinese language schools were established with Qing government funds in the Chinatowns of San Francisco, New York, and Chicago at the turn of the twentieth century. Later funded by the CCBA and the republican government, they spread to Chinatowns across the country during the 1930s (Chao 1996).

Other types of organizations existed in Chinatowns during the period of exclusion. The Native Sons of the Golden State (later changed to the Chinese-American Citizens Alliance) was formed in 1904 in San Francisco by the second-generation Chinese, to protest legislation that adversely affected the civic life of the Chinese community. In the 1930s, the Chinese Hand Laundry Alliance was established in New York, to combat co-ethnic exploitation by the CCBA and *tongs*. However, these progressive organizations were not supported by the traditional power structure of the community, and their leaders were excluded from élite positions within in it (Kuo 1977; Wong 1977).

Overall, Chinatown and the ethnic organizations that emerged within it during the period of Chinese exclusion were essentially sojourning bachelors' societies. Their original orientation was toward an eventual return to their ancestral homeland, and this orientation was reinforced by racism and legal exclusion.

Immigration on restricted quotas and the community in transition

The Chinese immigrant community entered a new era with the repeal of the *Chinese Exclusion Act* in 1943 and the passage of the *War Brides Act* in 1945. However, only a restricted annual quota of 105 Chinese nationals was permitted to immigrate (Sung 1987). Nonetheless, the ethnic community had been actively involved in supporting their adopted country during WWII and had sent their adult children to serve in the military of the country that had once excluded them. In the decade following the end of the war, a few thousand Chinese, mostly women and political refugees fleeing the 1949 Communist takeover, were admitted to the United States.

During this period of restricted immigration, Chinatown underwent significant changes and slowly dissolved its long-time isolation from the host society and from diasporic Chinese communities in other parts of the world. The founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) cut Chinatowns off from homeland networks, and pushed the ethnic community both to become more involved in homeland politics and to reconnect with other overseas Chinese communities in Asia. The CCBA supported the exiled KMT government in Taiwan. The few who supported the PRC government were silenced, as the political agenda of Chinatown coincided with the US policy of communist containment in China and the Asia Pacific region, and the community became selectively involved in mainstream politics.

Even though many old-timers and traditional ethnic organizations in Chinatowns continued to keep their dream of return alive, they inevitably came to realize that it was unrealistic. Thus, they began to send for families and pressured their associations to help with family reunification, housing, language acquisition, job training, and improvement of working conditions. However, because of long-time structural isolation, most traditional associations lacked formal ties to the larger society; the resources they mustered were sufficient for survival but not for social mobility in the host society.

During this period, a small number of new ethnic organizations began to challenge the traditional organizational hierarchy in Chinatowns. Most were registered as non-profit organizations and raised funds primarily from local governments and private foundations of the host society. Most of their founders and staff were children of immigrants who had grown up in Chinatown and who had returned to serve the community after having gotten college educations and become structurally assimilated into the mainstream middle-class. They were not bound by Chinatown's traditional power structure nor obligated to obey the elders nor intimidated by them. On a progressive political agenda, they sought to break away from old Chinese traditions and power structures, opting instead for community reform through the establishment of social service and civic organizations. The new organizations

aimed at serving the settlement needs of Chinese immigrants and at attacking social problems, such as poverty, unemployment, housing shortage, school dropout, juvenile delinquency, and inadequate health care, which plagued the community (Kuo 1977). Unlike the old ethnic associations, these service and civic organizations served the entire Chinese community; they did not require membership based on family, kinship, or place of origin. The new leaders were interested in power not for economic gain but to affect public policy and integrate the ethnic community into the larger society. Despite their good intentions, however, they and their organizations often found themselves struggling for finances and for grassroots support. Many programs and projects initiated during the 1950s and 1960s suffered from insufficient funding and ineffective implementation (Kuo 1977).

Contemporary Chinese immigration and changes in Chinatowns

At the peak of Chinese exclusion in 1900, the population of ethnic Chinese in the United States dropped below the 120,000 mark, and had a ratio of 1,385 men to 100 women. However, drastic changes have taken place in the Chinese community since the 1970s. The passage of the *Hart-Celler Act* in 1965 abolished the national origins quota system and promoted family reunification and skilled migration. Chinese immigration to the US dramatically increased.[4] By 2000, the ethnic population reached 2.8 million (including nearly half a million mixed-race persons) — a more than tenfold increase from 1960 (237,292) — and a nearly balanced sex ratio.

The new immigrants are diverse in origin, socio-economic status, and settlement pattern. Of the immigrants, fifty-two percent are from the Mainland, twenty-three percent from Taiwan, thirteen percent from Hong Kong, and the rest from Southeast Asia, Latin America, and other parts of the Chinese diaspora. This diversity means that not all share the same languages or dialects, religious beliefs and practices, habits, behavioral patterns, or even food. They do not necessarily share the same notion of the motherland or the same sense of nationality, and this is often a source of resentment, prejudice, and alienation, inhibiting productive intra-group interactions. Even among Mainlanders, there is a divide between Cantonese and "Northerners."[5] In today's Chinatown, the Taishanese and Cantonese no longer dominate; immigrants from Fujian, from which the majority of illegal immigrants have come (Guest 2003), and ethnic Chinese from Vietnam have gained strong footholds (Chin 1996; Kwong 1987). These new Chinatown residents no longer share the same dialect and the same affinity to hometowns and villages, creating new sources of intra-ethnic conflicts within Chinatown. Among Taiwanese and Hong Kongese, there is a cultural and political split between the natives — those born in Taiwan or Hong Kong — and the

expatriates fleeing the Communist regime, including some of their descendants.

Post-1965 Chinese immigrants also come from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. There are unskilled laborers, small entrepreneurs, skilled workers, professionals, transnational capitalists, and political refugees. The 1990 US census notes the differences among Chinese immigrants by national origin. Of those aged twenty-five or older, thirty-one percent from the Mainland, sixty-two percent from Taiwan, and forty-six percent from Hong Kong reported having attained college degrees, compared to twenty-one percent of all Americans. Among employed immigrants aged sixteen or older, twenty-nine percent of those from the Mainland, forty-seven percent from Taiwan, and forty-one percent from Hong Kong held managerial or professional occupations, compared to less than twenty-five percent of all employed Americans. Median family income was $34,000 for Mainland immigrants, $34,000 for Taiwan immigrants, and $50,000 for Hong Kong immigrants, compared to $30,000 for average American households. While these figures are above the national average, the spread is quite uneven, especially among Mainland immigrants: forty percent had not attained a high school diploma, compared to eight percent of immigrants from Taiwan, eighteen percent of those from Hong Kong, and twenty-two percent of all Americans. The poverty rate for Mainland immigrant families was thirteen percent compared to twelve percent for Taiwanese immigrants, seven percent for Hong Kong immigrants, and about ten percent for all Americans (Zhou 2001; Zhou 2003a). These diverse socio-economic backgrounds imply different patterns of economic and political incorporation. Affluent and highly skilled immigrants tend to bypass Chinatown to integrate directly into the American middle class, whereas the poor and less skilled continue to rely on the ethnic community for social and material support and remain mostly separated from the larger society (Zhou and Kim 2003).

Today's Chinese immigrant community is no longer bounded in a few urban enclaves on the west and northeast coasts. It has grown in all directions, penetrating urban neighborhoods and cities where few of their co-ethnic predecessors had ever set foot. More striking has been the emergence of socio-economically versatile suburban ethnic enclaves containing diverse national origin groups, and no single ethnic group is dominant (Zhou and Kim 2003). These "global enclaves" (Zhou and Kim 2003) or "ethnoburbs" (Li 1997) represent a reversed trend of ethnic concentration (the normal trend being suburban dispersion) and tend to be thriving and growing. In ethnoburbs in Los Angeles, for example, immigrants with higher than average education and income are creating their own ethnic economies and revitalizing declining local economies, which apparently taunts the time-honored path to social mobility and assimilation. As a result of the tremendous influx of new Chinese immigrants, the Chinatown of shared origins and the shared

culture of a transplanted village has evolved into a full-fledged family-based community with a new cosmopolitan vibrancy transcending territorial and national boundaries (Fong 2003; Zhou and Kim 2001). Within this context, new ethnic organizations have sprung up in Chinatowns and beyond the ethnic enclaves, while traditional organizations have been pressured to reform themselves.

Community Dynamics and Development: Old versus New Ethnic Organizations

Reacting to change: Old ethnic organizations

The traditional organizational structure of old Chinatown can be understood in the context of Chinese exclusion. Old Chinatown's power structure was hierarchical and straightforward: CCBA on top; a horizontal array of family, district, and merchant associations in the middle; and individuals at the bottom. Each family, district, and merchant association was also structured hierarchically. Individual members interacted with one another on a face-to-face basis; they knew who the "big persons" were, whom they had to rely on as their "back mountains" (Wong 1988). "Everybody knew who had money and influence in the Chinatown those days," recalled a 90-year-old Chinese immigrant in New York's Chinatown. Leaders of the powerful family, district, merchant associations and the CCBA, called *kiu lings*, were rooted in Chinatowns and had overlapping involvement in all aspects of community affairs, particularly economic ones.

The relationships between various associations and individuals, between associations and the CCBA, and between the élite and the masses in old Chinatowns were interdependent, and the power structure was relatively unified, for several reasons. First, the early Chinese immigrants came from a few tightly knit rural communities in south China. Although there were variations in dialects and bases of networks, most of them were Cantonese, came from similar socio-economic backgrounds, arrived in America in groups as contract laborers, and had similar jobs. They lacked human capital, English language proficiency, and information on employment, and thus were dependent on a small group of co-ethnic labor brokers or merchants, and later on co-ethnic organizations. Second, most of them were sojourners who did not intend to settle in the US. Without their families, they were highly dependent on one another for social support and companionship. Third, the hostility of the host society and legal exclusion from the larger society meant few were able to venture beyond their own ethnic enclaves. These structural constraints strengthened immigrant networks, created opportunities for community organization, and gave rise to a relatively uniform and interdependent organizational structure.

In the wake of large-scale Chinese immigration, many old organizations have found themselves constrained by broader structural factors, as well as by their own limitations. First, membership bases of traditional organizations, which were characteristic of kinship and village ties, were eroded by the aging of old-timers, the out-movement of the second generation, and the diversity of socio-economic background of the newcomers. Second, the structure of traditional organizations built on service to illiterate or semi-literate, low-skilled, and socially excluded sojourners has become insufficient for accommodating the settlement and mobility needs of newcomers in a relatively open mainstream society. Third, new ethnic organizations and service-oriented ethnic businesses provide alternative sources of support for the various settlement needs of both old and new immigrants. Consequently, many family and district associations are experiencing decline, and some have already been reduced to mere symbolic status, such as serving as informal card/chess/mahjong clubs for old-timers.

Although they have declined in power, old ethnic organizations are not merely a phenomenon of the past. Within Chinatown, the CCBA and some of larger, more resourceful associations have continued to reap material gains from their property holdings, territorial control, and business investments (Chin 1996; Kwong 1987). To respond to the demands of new immigrants, these old organizations have switched their orientation from sojourning to settlement and assimilation. For example, the CCBA in New York's Chinatown has expanded its Chinese language school and begun an adult career training center, a daycare center, evening English programs, and a variety of social service programs (Zhou 1997), while improving cooperation with new civic organizations (Kuo 1977: 43). As a result of the normalization of China-US relations, the CCBA and traditional associations are now eager to establish contacts with PRC officials. In this way, old organizations have consolidated their positions in the ethnic community.

Emerging with diversity: New ethnic organizations in Chinatowns and Chinese ethnoburbs

Parallel to demographic and social changes in the Chinese community, a range of new ethnic organizations have emerged. Most visible of these new ethnic organizations are the social services organizations in Chinatowns and Chinese ethnoburbs (Zhou and Kim 2001). These non-profit organizations, run by educated immigrants or the children of immigrants, provide services such as English classes, job training centers, health clinics, welfare and housing agencies, legal services, employment referral services, community cultural centers, history projects, daycare and family counseling, and youth programs.

Unlike the leaders of traditional organizations, who, as "cultural

managers," supported Chinese culture, identity, self-determination, and the status quo in Chinatown (Fong 1994: 153), the leaders of new social service organizations are more concerned with interethnic relations, citizen and immigrant rights, equality, and the general well-being of the community. Inspired by the Civil Rights Movement, they attempt to bring the ethnic community on track with the norms and standards of the mainstream society. However, they are not fully accepted by the community that they seek to serve. They have been criticized for being naïve, insensitive to the cultural specific needs of the community, and ignorant of the power of family, kinship, and friendship bonds, and are accused of using white middle-class formulas to solve Chinese immigrants' social problems. Part of the problem has been that the new leaders reside outside of the ethnic communities they are trying to help, lack long-term vested interests there, and are dependent on outside funding.

Other spatially rooted new ethnic organizations are churches and temples that have sprung up in Chinatowns and ethnoburbs, ranging from Buddhist, Taoist, Protestant, and Catholic, to Chinese folk religion. The ethnic religious organizations located in Chinatowns or Chinese ethnoburbs are generally well connected to the ethnic community's various economic structures, providing an important physical space where immigrants meet and rebuild social relations as well as find meaning and identity for their struggle and migration experiences (Yang 1999). In New York City's Chinatown, for example, the growth of Fujianese immigrants, who are predominantly rural, uneducated, and undocumented, is accompanied by the increasing presence of new temples and churches. These Fujianese religious organizations function much like Chinatown's traditional kinship associations in providing social services and economic opportunities to help disadvantaged immigrants survive adverse circumstances, in addition to offering spiritual support (Guest 2003).

Geographically unbounded ethnic organizations

In the past two decades, new ethnic organizations have also sprung up in large numbers outside the geographical confines of ethnic enclaves. These include professional organizations, alumni associations, suburban Chinese language schools, suburban religious organizations, and political and civil rights organizations (Zhou and Kim 2001).

Professional and business associations are registered non-profit organizations and generally have loose organizational structures. Based on our random search of organizational websites and on informal interviews with organizational leaders in the suburbs of New York, Los Angeles, and Washington DC, we can roughly summarize some of the main characteristics of Chinese immigrant professional organizations.[6] First of all, although they

vary in size and type of profession, most are in science, technology, and business, and a smaller number in law or medicine. Only a handful of them are in the social sciences, humanities, and arts. Membership ranges from a few dozen to over 2,000. Second, most of them are formal in organizational structure but operate entirely with volunteer officers and board members, who are professionals fully employed elsewhere. Third, these organizations serve several purposes, perhaps the most important being professional network-building for both social support and information exchange on opportunities in the United States, China, and other Chinese diasporic communities. Other goals include building US-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 American society. Fourth, the organizations depend on funds and sponsorship from Chinese immigrants and Chinese-owned businesses, and from mainstream financial institutions and manufacturing firms. Fifth, although most professional organizations hold meetings, seminars on special topics, and informal socials on a semi-regular basis, the chief means of communication is through email and the Internet.

Alumni associations represent alumni of colleges and universities, and to a lesser extent high schools, from which the immigrants had graduated prior to immigrating to the United States. Unlike professional associations, they are loosely structured. Their chief purposes are to promote China and their alma mater to the United States and to the world and, more importantly, to rebuild and maintain networks of friends through informal socials and Chinese holiday celebrations.

As Chinese immigrants became residentially dispersed in suburbs, Chinese language schools began to spring up there. As of the mid-1990s, there were approximately 635 Chinese language schools in the United States (189 in California) enrolling nearly 83,000 students (Chao 1996). A large number of these language schools were located outside Chinatown or Chinese ethnoburbs. Like those in Chinatown and ethnoburbs, suburban Chinese schools have Chinese language and culture classes for K-12 children; unlike in the former, however, parental involvement is extremely intense. As most are registered as non-profit organizations,[7] parents automatically become members of the school's administrative bodies and volunteer to serve as principal and/or administrative officials (Chao 1996; Fong 2002; Wang 1996). As a result, suburban Chinese schools function as ethnic social organizations in which adults (parents) come to socialize (Zhou and Li 2003). In an interview, one Chinese parent likened the suburban Chinese school to a church: "We are non-religious and don't go to church. So coming to Chinese school weekly is like going to church for us. While our children are in class, we parents don't just go home, because we live quite far away. We spend time there and participate in a variety of things that we organize for ourselves,

including dancing, fitness exercise, seminars on the stock market, family financial management, children's college prep. I kind of look forward to going to the Chinese school on Saturdays, because that is the only time we can socialize with our own people in our native language. I know some of our older kids don't like it that much. When they complain, I simply tell them, "This is not a matter of choice; you must go."[8]

New religious organizations, mostly non-denominational Christian groups, have sprung up within the geographically unbounded Chinese immigrant community. Although some of these are located in Chinatowns or ethnoburbs, many are geographically dispersed and have members from the highly skilled, highly assimilated segment of the immigrant population. While most have clearly stated religious missions, they also often serve important social functions similar to those of professional and/or alumni associations. Some specify secular goals, mainly networking and information exchange, to enhance the mobility prospects of Chinese immigrants.

Last but not least, ethnic political and civil rights organizations can be found in Chinatown, in ethnoburbs and elsewhere, but they are generally geographically unbounded. 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 and in the northeast. They are concerned primarily with civil rights issues, particularly those relating to minority and immigrant rights, representation in the mainstream economy and politics, and inter-group relations. Most political organizations started out as ethnic organizations and later developed into pan-ethnic organizations. The Organization of Chinese Americans (OCA) is the most influential Chinese American advocacy organization, now a pan-Asian organization, working on broader Asian American issues and accepting membership from other Asian American groups. Immigrant-led ethnic political organizations are relatively rare. Many immigrant ethnic organizations are certainly concerned with US and native homeland politics, but they seldom explicitly or publicly express their political positions in the mission statement. One exception is the Taiwanese Association of America (TAA). According to the TAA website home page, "TAA is formed for the purposes of fellowship. Because of the unique political situations and historical background of Taiwan, our members are concerned about the future of Taiwan and pay close attention to the wellbeing of Taiwanese people" (http://taa.formosa.org). Because of the perceived threat of mainland China to Taiwan, the TAA has been actively involved in politics both in the US (such as lobbying the US Congress in support of Taiwanese interests) and in Taiwan (such as influencing Taiwanese national elections).

Other ethnic organizations, mostly informal, based on interests, gender, and sexuality, have also become a visible part of the spatially unbounded Chinese immigrant community. Gender groups are mostly concerned with

women's issues. The best known is the North American Taiwanese Women's Association, which has eight regional chapters and holds annual and semi-annual conventions. Its mission is to promote the self-confidence and dignity of women, gender equality, the development of women's potential, and the participation of women in politics and policy making. Gay and lesbian groups, though marginalized both by the Chinese immigrant community and by the mainstream society, have also appeared.

Compared to traditional organizations rooted in Chinatown, new Chinese immigrant organizations that are geographically unbounded lack cohesion. They do not and cannot impose stringent controls on their members, because they have few claims on ethnically defined territories, businesses, or professions, and their membership is highly fluid. They are thus less stable and resilient than the traditional organizations. Many rely heavily on the enthusiasm and voluntarism of just a few leaders (or founders) and lack regularity and long-term planning. When these leaders step down (or burn out), the next generation of leaders is likely either to change the course of the organization or to keep the status quo without much enthusiasm. Although internal conflicts among new ethnic organizations exist, they rarely reach the level of intensity of those in old Chinatown, because the leadership of new organizations is more transient and less interested in economic goals. Some organizations may simply dissolve, and leaders or members withdraw, before conflicts get out of control.

In sum, both old and new ethnic organizations fill the diverse demands of Chinese immigrants in the United States, despite differences in ideology and organizational forms and styles. Both serve as important sites for face-to-face interactions that help maintain social ties. One common characteristic of new ethnic organizations is that leadership and staff are composed of immigrant co-ethnics who are highly assimilated, as measured by levels of English proficiency, education, occupation, income, and place of residence. It thus seems that building and maintaining ethnic organizations and networks is carried out by the socio-economically mobile and highly assimilated, indicating that assimilation is not a clear-cut, linear progression.

The Salience of ethnicity and the paradox of assimilation

Chinatown and its ethnic organizations originated from the powerlessness of Chinese immigrants before powerful legal and social institutions of the host society. Larger structural constraints created opportunities for ethnic organizing, and prompted the revalorization of the symbols of a common ethnicity and the consolidation of a cohesive, though internally conflicted, ethnic community. During the period of Chinese exclusion, high levels of cohesion among members of family, district, and merchant associations were

critical for their very existence and development. Members of these associations adhered to a kin ideology which predicated ancestral, family, or brotherhood honor; face-saving; a clear code of conduct and enforced order; consensus; and reciprocity. Reciprocity and associated networks were essential for individuals and their leaders, and for ethnic institutions and businesses (Zhou 1992).

The anthropologist Bernard Wong illustrated how reciprocal patron-client relationships between leaders and members within the association and between merchants and workers within the community were initiated, accepted, and maintained (Wong 1988). According to Wong, patron-client relations in Chinatown were based on three main factors: the moral system; the system of formal positions and accompanying rights and obligations; and the pool of resources, which included capital, human resources, language ability, information, property, expertise, and connections. The closer these patron-client relationships were maintained within the family, the higher the level of cohesion. For example, ethnic businesses in old Chinatowns were primarily operated on the networks of kinship, clanship, ritual brotherhood, or place of origin, bases on which most of the traditional ethnic organizations were founded. The shared basis for association among members had the effect of diminishing class conflict between the wealthier merchants and workers within the community.

Internal conflicts, exclusion, and, in some cases, coercion served to strengthen ethnic solidarity. Conflicts among different factions and associations over power and control of territory and the ethnic economy were prevalent (Lyman 1974). Individual conflicts often centered on money or a breach of contract. However, the associations subjected individual members, including leaders, to an intricate system of social control. Any deviant behavior was considered a breach of trust, a threat to group solidarity and a basis for sanction and exclusion. In many cases, conflict was mitigated by interdependent relationships. For example, a paternalistic patron-client relationship bound the workers and the labor brokers or merchants to each other's goals. For the labor brokers, making money was the goal; for the workers, securing a job that could make their sojourning dream come true was crucial (Wong 1988). This kind of interdependent relationship, combined with family or kinship bonds, common places of origin and organizational sanctions, generally kept individual conflicts to a minimum.

However, we should note that ethnic solidarity does not necessarily inhere in the moral convictions of individuals or in the value orientations to which they were socialized in the country of origin. Instead, ethnic solidarity is contingent upon structural constraints in the host society as well as the organizational structure of the ethnic community. Those from various dialect groups did not display any exceptional cohesion or a strong sense of being Chinese in the homeland; and individual associations in Chinatown often had

competing interests. In old Chinatown, there was a consensus, at both individual and organizational levels, that ethnic solidarity was only a logical strategy to combat a social system that subjected the entire phenotypically identifiable ethnic group for exclusion. Thus unfavorable reception by the host society prompted the revalorization of the symbols of common nationality and the privileging of the ethnic community as the locus of self-determination and as the basis for social capital formation (Portes and Zhou 1992).

Since the 1970s, the traditional monopoly power structure in Chinatown has gradually dissolved as its constituencies — old-time business owners and workers — age, the community becomes increasingly heterogeneous, and socially mobile co-ethnic members, many of them second generation, move into middle-class suburbs. Changes in the context of reception — the lifting of legal exclusion, a generally more open society, and a receiving ethnic community oriented towards integration — give rise to more, not fewer, ethnic organizations and perpetuate a trend toward ethnic involvement among those already been assimilated, either the second generation or the new immigrants who are highly educated and socially mobile upon arrival. This seems counterintuitive to the conventional wisdom on assimilation, which assumes that the ethnic community and the host society are inherently conflicted and mutually exclusive; that a natural process exists by which diverse ethnic groups shed their cultural baggage and come to share a common culture and identity; and that, once set in motion, this process moves inevitably and irreversibly toward assimilation (Alba 1985; Gordon 1964; Warner and Srole 1945).

In our view, the very fact that Chinese immigrants are allowed to assimilate and that they then may return to the ethnic community indicates that a fixed notion of the ethnic community as an isolated entity no longer applies. Community reform has been prompted by two internal forces: one from immigrants, especially those lacking English language proficiency, job skills, and employment networks to the mainstream economy; the other from assimilated co-ethnics. Contemporary Chinese immigrants are primarily concerned with three issues of settlement: employment, homeownership, and children's education. In many cases, an immigrant is regarded as highly successful if he or she runs a business or becomes a *laoban* (boss), if he or she owns a home (even if it means the family lives in a cramped basement and rents the rest of the house out), and/or if the children go to an Ivy League college (Zhou 2003b). The ethnic community and ethnic organizations must respond to these concerns. However, US-born adult children of immigrants and socio-economically advantaged new immigrants are also morally committed to community work to establish new organizations to assist immigrant adaptation. Run by progressive and assimilated co-ethnics, new social services and other ethnic organizations create internal competition, pressuring old organizations to change (Fong 1994). The injection of new

blood, then, not only replenishes the ethnic community's organizational basis but also changes its nature.

Therefore, we should 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 culture, despite its distinct internal dynamics, as essentially contributing to rather than competing with the mainstream culture. The case of organizational development in the Chinese immigrant community provides some useful insights for the understanding of the paradox of ethnicization and assimilation. The ultimate question is: are Chinese immigrants involved in the ethnic community 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 ethnic organizations. Even though adherence to ethnic organizations 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 (see Fong and Lee in this volume). Thus, assimilation of this sort does not conform to the conventional notion of assimilation, which underscores a unified White Anglo-Saxon Protestant core culture. Rather, new Chinese immigrants are being assimilated into the multifaceted ethnic milieu that characterizes America (Yang 1999; Zhou 2003b).

However, to the extent that they comfortably live their own ethnic lives in America, they may, intentionally or unintentionally, bypass opportunities for primary group interaction. One of the main constraints on the ethnic community is its group exclusion. We have seen signs that Chinese immigrants are not mixing well with native-born non-co-ethnics in ethnic enclaves and ethnoburbs (Fong 1994; Horton 1995; Zhou and Kim 2003). 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, in upscale Chinese immigrant communities in Monterey Park, California and Flushing, New York, non-Chinese residents feel they are being pushed out of their own backyards and that they are being un-Americanized by the many middle-class Chinese immigrants with higher-than-average levels of education and household incomes, who move directly into the suburbs upon arrival (Horton 1995; Zhou and Kim 2003). Although Chinese immigrants are perceived as foreign "invaders," native-born Asian Americans are also stereotyped as foreigners — receiving praise for speaking "good" English when English is their first language or being told to go back to their country when the US is their native country. This perception of Chinese and Asian Americans as forever foreigners is deep-seated in the American psychic. Asian Americans are perennially caught in situations in which they feel compelled to prove their loyalty and patriotism, despite the

tremendous inroads into American society they have made, largely on the strength of their own ethnic communities (Horton 1995). Ethnic communities need to find innovative ways to collectively counter their stereotypes and foster greater inter-ethnic understanding and inclusion.

Conclusion

The Chinese immigrant community in the United States has gone through tremendous changes since Chinese immigration began in the US in the late 1840s. Diverse ethnic organizations have emerged in old Chinatowns, new Chinese ethnoburbs, and outside geographically defined communities. Underlying the community and its diverse organizations has been an interlocking web of social networks. In the early period of unrestricted migration, labor brokers and merchants utilized their connections to homeland villages and the transnational coolie trade to establish their élite status, while providing compatriots with instrumental assistance to ease the difficulties of sojourning in a foreign land. In the period of Chinese exclusion, ethnic organizations became consolidated in the form of family, district, or merchant associations in old Chinatowns and exercised tight control over all aspects of immigrant life. During the time of immigration on restricted quotas, the traditional Chinatown organizations faced challenges as immigrants reoriented themselves from sojourning to settling in the United States. Utilizing networks that extend beyond the confines of Chinatown, the second generation, without deep connections in the system of ethnic networks, managed to establish new service and civic organizations in the ethnic community. They pressured the old organizations to accommodate to structural and demographic changes and shook up the monopoly of the old power élite. After the liberalization and equalization of immigration policies in the late 1960s, new ethnic organizations emerged. Run by structurally assimilated immigrants and their children, these new ethnic organizations provide not only instrumental support for immigrant adaptation but also important sites for reestablishing ethnic networks.

The story of ethnic organizations and network building within the Chinese immigrant community suggest the salience of ethnicity in America — which can undoubtedly be a source of strengths as well as a liability. We have found that immigrants are empowered by their ethnic organizations to the extent that they maintain a strong sense of "Chineseness" and ethnic pride yet remain vulnerable to ethnic stereotypes and prejudice of the mainstream society because of their heightened ethnicity and lack of intimate contact with non-co-ethnic members. We are mindful that the existence of voluntary associations and ethnic networks, and of Chinatown itself, came about from the powerlessness of Chinese immigrants at the hands of powerful legal and

social institutions of the host society. The unfavorable societal reception prompted the revalorization of the symbols of common ethnicity and the consolidation of a cohesive ethnic community. However, the removal of structural barriers to assimilation does not lead to the decline of ethnic enclaves and ethnic organizations. Hence we underscore the macro-structural forces that influence and necessitate the formation and diversification of ethnic organizations and the internal dynamics that perpetuate ethnic community development. We argue that it is the complexity of the reality, along with its multifaceted and dynamic nature, that makes it difficult to apprehend the paradox of ethnicization and assimilation within any simple framework.

Notes

1 We have benefited from insightful discussions with prominent civic and business leaders, community organizers, and residents in the Chinese immigrant community in the metropolitan regions of Los Angeles, New York, and Washington DC. We are very grateful for their assistance. We wish to extend our gratitude especially to Ruben Gowrichan, Paul Huang, and Roger Waldinger for their helpful comments. We also thank Amy Chai and Emily Seto for their research assistance.

2 Existing literature has provided ample theoretical and empirical insights on the formation and functions of Chinese ethnic organizations in the United States (Cattell 1962; Kuo 1977; Kwong 1987; Lee 1960; Lyman 1986; Wong 1977 and 1988). Although drawing heavily on this rich literature, this study is based on our own observations of several Chinatowns in New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Washington DC between 1986 and 2001; from interviews with ethnic businessmen, organization leaders, and old-timers in those communities; and from mainstream and ethnic newspaper archives.

3 Sze Yap region generally refers to four hillside counties in the Canton region in Guangdong Province: Taishan, Enping, Kaiping, and Xinhui. People from Sze Yap speak a local dialect that is incomprehensible even to the Cantonese. Earlier laborers were also disproportionately drawn from the Pearl River Delta area of Canton, such as Nanhai, Panyu, and Zhongshan.

4 Enacted in 1968, the *Hart-Celler Act* opened the door for Chinese immigration on an equal basis. The annual admission ceiling for China increased from 105 persons to 20,000, and immediate relatives of US citizens were not subject to numerical limitations. Taiwan was also granted 20,000, and Hong Kong, 30,000.

5 Historically, the overwhelming majority of Chinese immigrants originated from rural areas in the Canton region, now Guangdong Province. The Cantonese referred to anybody from other parts of China as "Northerners," including those from southern provinces such as Fujian, Shanghai, Hunan, and Sichuan. Of these, only Fujian Province was a key emigrant region, although most Fujianese went to Taiwan or Southeast Asia rather than to America.

6   Most of the new ethnic organizations, including the newly found alumni associations and profession associations, have websites or homepages with an email address and relevant links. We traced these website links to approach our potential interviewees via email and then set up informal, unstructured phone or face-to-face interviews, probing such issues as their missions, membership eligibility and composition, regularities of activities, and types of services provided.

7   For-profit Chinese language schools found in Chinatowns or ethnoburbs include many offering kindergarten and childcare for young children and various tutorial programs for secondary school students (Wang 1996).

8   Interview at the Hope Chinese School in Rockville, Maryland, December 2001.

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