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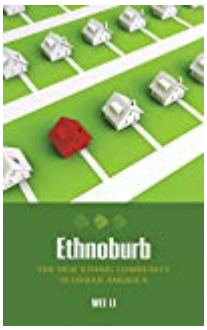
Wei Li. *Ethnoburb: The New Ethnic Community in Urban America.* Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009. xvii + 214 pp. $56.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8248-3065-6.



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Commissioned by Sharon L. Irish (University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign)

Classic American images of suburbia usually depict white, middle-class, native-born families living out the "American Dream." Immigrants, on the other hand, remained in urban ethnic neighborhoods, often cramped and crime-ridden, until they saved enough money to move to the suburbs and assimilate into mainstream white society. However, beginning in the 1960s and continuing through the present, a number of political and economic conditions have led to the creation of what Wei Li calls "ethnoburbs"-- suburban neighborhoods dominated residentially and commercially by non-white ethnic groups. Focusing specifically on Chinese ethnoburbs in Los Angeles County, Li draws widely on U.S. Census data to argue that the global economy, geopolitics, and changes in U.S. immigration policies spurred the development of ethnoburbs in which immigrants of diverse income and educational levels create communities with class stratification and both international and local businesses.

Li opens her study by situating it within the theoretical literature on racial and spatial formation before developing her concept of the ethnoburb. Unlike urban immigrant "ethnic enclaves," in which the majority of residents are low-income and limited in employable skills, ethnoburbs draw a wide range of immigrants, from wealthy, highly educated entrepreneurs to poor, unskilled workers. The globalized economy dominated by multinational corporations, Li explains, depends in large part on "highly-skilled and well-educated immigrant professionals" to work in financial, computer technology, biotech, and other high-tech globalized firms (p. 31). Seeking living conditions better than those in urban ethnic neighborhoods, wealthy professionals immigrate to suburban clusters that tend to be ethnically or racially diverse, or otherwise tolerant of newcomers. With the influx of middle-class and wealthy immigrants comes a need for an "ethnic economy"--services and businesses such as restaurants and grocery stores that cater to the immigrant population. The service industry then creates jobs for poor, unskilled immigrants of the same ethnic

or language group, thus creating the immigrant class stratification characteristic of ethnoburbs.

Following the theoretical chapters of the book, Li delves into the case study of the Chinese ethnoburbs of Los Angeles County's San Gabriel Valley. Chinese immigrants had begun arriving on U.S. shores in large numbers in the mid-nineteenth century, driven from their homeland by Qing dynasty corruption and oppression. While American business owners initially welcomed Chinese immigrants as cheap labor, growing anti-Chinese sentiment led to a number of immigration restriction laws, culminating in the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. The law was repealed in 1943 as the United States sought to build ties with its war ally China. Legislation allowing American servicemen to bring their war brides to the United States led to an increase in Chinese women immigrants after World War Two, and the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 increased immigration quotas, allowing for an explosion of Chinese immigration. Li notes that the Chinese population in the United States doubled each decade from 1960 through 1990 and was the fourth largest ethnic group by 1990.

Before the 1960s, Chinese immigrants to the Los Angeles area settled in the city's Chinatown, but by the mid-1960s, they had begun to follow the suburbanization trend. Additionally, deteriorating conditions in Chinatown and the 1965 Watts riot led Chinese immigrants to flee to the suburbs. The first San Gabriel Valley suburb to draw Chinese residents was Monterey Park, which was close to three major highways, already had a small Chinese population, and was ethnically diverse. Businesses and a Chinese-language newspaper followed, and soon Monterey Park was dubbed the "Chinese Beverly Hills" by Asian media. In the 1980s, immigrants from Southeast Asia began settling in the San Gabriel Valley ethnoburbs, filling the service jobs in the businesses that catered to the middle-class and wealthy Chinese.

In many ways, the settlement of the San Gabriel Valley ethnoburbs was not unlike the nationwide suburbanization of the post-World War Two period. Suburbs' appeal lay in their distance from blighted urban centers, well-kept homes, and easy access to goods and services, and ethnoburbs were no different. However, ethnoburbs did not demand assimilation into middle-class white America; indeed, the development of ethnoburbs was a direct form of resistance against assimilation. Immigrant communities like those of the San Gabriel Valley provided their residents with all of the perceived perks of suburbia without the requirement that immigrants discard or conceal their culture, language, and traditions. As Li's well-written and thoroughly researched study demonstrates, American social, economic, political, and living patterns, and maintenance of the nation's diversity rather than forced assimilation, will do much to strengthen the United States in the increasingly globalized world.

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