Chapter 1

FROM MONTEREY PARK TO LITTLE TAIPEI

Damn it, Dad, where the hell did all these Chinese come from? Shit, this isn't our town any more.

—A Japanese American on his return to Monterey Park

You're from Los Angeles? Isn't that near Monterey Park?

—Heard in Taiwan

BY UNCONGESTED freeway, Monterey Park is about ten minutes east of downtown Los Angeles. Our drive takes us past the gleaming postmodern monuments to Pacific Rim capital and beyond the black, Korea, China, Latino, and J(Japan)-towns of the central city to the west end of the commercial and residential sprawl of the San Gabriel Valley, the eastern gateway to suburbia and the desert spillovers of the megalopolis.

With only 7.7 square miles and an estimated population of about 63,000 in 1994, Monterey Park is one of 84 cities incorporated within the administratively fragmented County of Los Angeles (4,090 square miles, more than 9 million people). Not in the standard tourist guide, Monterey Park is nevertheless recognized by Chinese the world over as America's first suburban Chinatown, sometimes disdained as "Mandarin Park" by disgruntled Anglo, Latino, and Asian American old-time residents, and regularly monitored by politicians, reporters, and social scientists as a microcosm of the ethnic, economic, and political changes wrought by immigration.[1]

The ethnic transformation of Monterey Park began slowly with the migration of domestic minorities from the city to the suburbs. In 1960 Monterey Park was an Anglo town (85 percent) giving way to the suburban aspirations of primarily native-born Latinos (12 percent) and Asian Americans (3 percent). By 1970 Monterey Park had become a middle-class home for Mexican Americans from nearby working-class East Los Angeles and for Japanese Americans from enclaves in the east and west sides of L.A. and from regions of forced wartime internment and exile.

There was also a migration of Chinese from the old Chinatown located just eight miles west of Monterey Park. The migration of Asian and Latino minorities to the suburbs was the combined result of postwar economic mobility and the legal and informal erosion of discrimination in housing.

In retrospect, the process of residential integration was remarkably smooth before 1970. Ethnic newcomers had not yet tipped the ethnic balance in their favor and were not a threat to Anglo political and institutional dominance. Nevertheless, there was resistance. In the 1950s, some Asian Americans bought their homes through third parties. Others bypassed reluctant old-timers by relying on the nondiscriminatory practices of a few developers. There was one racial confrontation in 1962 when the Congress of Racial Equality picketed a developer for refusing to sell a house to an African American graduate student and his wife.[2] CORE and its local supporters won out, but few African Americans have made their homes in Monterey Park and adjacent cities in the western San Gabriel Valley. Their relative absence compared with Latinos and Asian Americans probably reflects higher levels of discrimination against African Americans and their later and different pattern of middle-class migration out of the central city.[3]

The second ethnic transformation of Monterey Park, clearly visible by the mid-1970s, was primarily the result of the immigration of Chinese and other Asians rather than the out-migration of native minorities. Their impact on the ethnic balance of Monterey Park was rapid and dramatic. In 1980 the city was almost evenly divided among Anglos (25 percent), Latinos (39 percent), and Asian Americans (35 percent). The small population of African Americans made up just over 1 percent of the community. By 1990 Asian residents had become the majority, with almost 60 percent of the population, while Anglos declined sharply to 12 percent and Latinos declined slightly to 31 percent of the total. The composition of the Asian population also shifted, the younger Chinese newcomers now decisively replacing older native-born Japanese Americans as the largest Asian group (Tables 1 and 2).[4]

Today, Monterey Park is a city completing its transition from a quiet, racially mixed bedroom suburb of aging single-family dwellings and dying commercial streets to a Pacific Rim hub with higher-density housing and a globally oriented financial and service center for a rapidly expanding regional Chinese population. The physical transition has been uneven. The city looks unfinished, caught between a Middle America of tranquil parks, tree-lined streets, and modest houses, and the encroaching restaurants, banks, supermarkets, mini-malls, condominiums, and traffic of a Chinese boom town.

The sights and sounds of the sixties and the nineties clash on the

TABLE 1 *Ethnic Change in Monterey Park, 1960–1990 (Groups as Percentage of Population)*

	1960	1970	1980	1990
Anglo	85.4	50.5	25.0	11.7
Latino	11.6	34.0	38.8	31.4
Asian/other	2.9	15.3	35.0	56.4
African American	0.1	0.2	1.2	0.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Community Development Department, Monterey Park.

major commercial streets—Garvey, Garfield, and Atlantic. In 1992, on North Atlantic Boulevard, one encountered in succession: Ai Hoa supermarket (the untranslated words roughly meaning, "Loving the Chinese Homeland"; the benign Vietnamese-Chinese phrase suggests nostalgia, although some old-timers might interpret it as "Non-Chinese, keep out"); more Chinese signs with enough English to identify the Little Taipei Restaurant, Red Rose Hair Design, Flying Horse Video, Cathay Bank, Remax Realty, and Bright Optical Watch; and empty lots, formerly Fred Frey Pontiac and Pic 'N' Save, awaiting Chinese development. Further down the street, Hughes Market and Marie Callender's Restaurant remain as monuments to a "Western" past.

The large Chinese ethnic economy spreads out along the traditional commercial streets in the north of Monterey Park. North Atlantic Boulevard is the last area open to major development. In 1991 the city selected

TABLE 2 *The Changing Asian Population of Monterey Park, 1970–1990 (Groups as Percentage of Asian Population)*

	1970	1980	1990
Japanese	61.4	39.9	17.4
Chinese	29.2	40.9	63.0
Filipino	6.4	4.3	3.1
Korean	1.5	6.2	3.5
Vietnamese	—	4.6	7.8
Other	1.5	4.1	5.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Monterey Park Planning Department; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1983, 1991.
Note: In 1970, Vietnamese were not identified as such. "Other" includes Native Americans as well as unidentified Asian Pacific people.

a Taiwanese firm to do the job, but in 1994 the project was still unfinished for many reasons, including the recession and disagreement over the appropriate mix of Chinese and mainstream tenants. Recognizing the local shopping needs of established "Americans," the city hired an Anglo developer to renovate an aging shopping mall on South Atlantic Boulevard in appropriate "Mediterranean style." Located in the heavily Latino part of town next to the traditional Mexican American barrio of East Los Angeles, Atlantic Square's supermarkets, chain restaurants, and specialty shops now serve Anglos and Asian Americans as well as Latinos.

The city is segregated by "American" and "Chinese" economic zones and by income. On rare smogless days, the wealthier residents enjoy spectacular views of the San Gabriel Mountains from their hillside homes; the less affluent, living in the flats, settle for views of their neighbors' houses. Although there are traditional pockets of Latinos in the south and east of town, Anglos in the center, and Japanese Americans in the hills of the east side, the city is residentially integrated. However, the presence of Chinese and other Asian newcomers in neighborhoods has been marked by increased density—the replacement of small single-family dwellings by larger homes ("monster houses" according to some oldtimers) or condominiums.

THE GLOBAL CONTEXT OF THE NEW ASIAN IMMIGRATION

Established residents, accustomed to things as they were or are imagined to have been, first experienced the new immigration as a calamity, like an earthquake, and asked, "Why did it happen, and why did it happen to us?" Missing from their focus on outsiders coming in was an understanding of how immigrants and established residents are connected in an increasingly interconnected world.

The immigration, and what *Time* magazine sensationally headlined "the Coloring of America," was not a natural disaster, or a unilateral act of outsiders.[5] It was the collective, complex, mostly unplanned result of American as well as Asian decisions regarding immigration, politics, and economic development. The case of Monterey Park needs to be understood in this global context.[6]

One decision that led to the phenomenal increase in non-European immigrants was made in the United States. The Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965 ended discriminatory quotas favoring Europeans over Asians and people of color. The act was less the result of a coherent policy than a compromising response to different political pressures in an expanding postwar economy, including a decade of civil rights struggles

against racism and the desire of business and political elites to give U.S. global power a nonracist, free-market image.[7]

Once their historic exclusion was reversed by law, Mexicans and Latin Americans became the largest group of newcomers to enter the United States legally, increasing the total Latino (immigrant and native-born) population by 53 percent from 1980 to 1990. The second-largest group were Asians. Today Asians are the fastest growing minority in America, their numbers increasing 95 percent between 1980 and 1990. In the same decade, by contrast, whites and African Americans, less affected by immigration, have increased only 6.0 and 13.2 percent respectively.[8]

The framers of the 1965 Immigration Act probably expected a continuation of the historical pattern of European immigration. At that moment, however, the labor surplus and the economic as well as political motives to emigrate were in Asia and Latin America, not in Europe. In the 1960s and 1970s, immigration from the Soviet bloc in Eastern Europe was severely restricted. The booming Western European economies were importing, not exporting, labor.

The situation was quite different for the developing countries in the Pacific Rim. They had a ready pool of emigrants formed by political instability and patterns of economic development strongly affected by U.S. influence in the region after World War II. The movement of Asian refugees across the Pacific was a direct consequence of U.S. cold war strategy and hot war involvement in civil wars in Korea, Vietnam, and Southeast Asia. It was also the indirect result of economic aid. To bolster its anticommunist allies, the United States poured millions of dollars into the friendly economies of Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the Philippines. In the process, the United States put its mark on the development of educational institutions and capitalist values, thereby ensuring the mental as well as economic preparation of elites oriented to the West.

The new immigration was also the result of decisions made entirely in Asia. The strategies of development behind the economic "miracles" in countries like South Korea and Taiwan—rapid proletarianization of rural populations, export-driven development, emphasis on higher education—created surpluses of both capital and unabsorbed labor. Liberalized immigration laws in the United States facilitated their entry.

The new laws encouraged the immigration of two different classes. Family reunification provisions continued the older and familiar movement of unskilled and semiskilled labor, thereby reinforcing the nonwhite character of the U.S. working class. However, 20 percent of the visas were allocated for professionals and other talented people whose skills were needed in the United States. Not Europeans, but Asians and other people of color, filled these quotas, thereby radically changing the racial and ethnic composition of the professional and managerial class.[9]

California has been the preferred destination of the new Asian immigrants, followed by Hawaii, Washington State, and New York State. Metropolitan Los Angeles, whose Asian population increased between 1970 and 1990 from 3 to 11 percent of the total, or from about 190,000 to 926,000 persons, has the largest concentration of Asians in the United States, larger than that of San Francisco, Honolulu, Seattle, New York, or Chicago.[10]

In Los Angeles, the arrival of an economically diverse population of Asian immigrants led to new patterns of dispersed and concentrated settlement. In the case of the Chinese, poorer and unskilled immigrants still found both employment and residence in the traditional Chinatown. However, more educated and affluent Chinese in search of better living conditions scattered throughout the county, and some settled east of Chinatown in Monterey Park and the middle class, ethnically mixed suburbs of the San Gabriel Valley.

Encompassing the small cities of Alhambra, Rosemead, Arcadia, Temple City, San Gabriel, South Pasadena, Pasadena, and Monterey Park, in 1990 the West San Gabriel Valley, with a population of nearly 350,000, was almost evenly divided among Anglo, Latino, and Asian populations. Maps 2 and 3 use census tract data to compare the geographical location in 1990 of all immigrants who arrived before 1980 with those who arrived between 1980 and 1990 in central Los Angeles County and surrounding areas.[11]

A comparison shows that Chinese immigrants arriving after 1980 were increasingly locating outside Monterey Park in the cities of Rosemead, San Gabriel, Alhambra, and Pasadena. Further east, El Monte and South El Monte reflect Latino as well as Asian immigration.

The general pattern of immigrant settlement in the central Los Angeles region is one of geographic expansion and concentration. In addition to the concentrations of Chinese immigrants in Chinatown and suburban San Gabriel Valley, Korean immigrants are found just west and south of downtown; Latinos downtown, east of downtown, and further south in regions stretching from Vernon to Lynwood; Armenians in Glendale; and Russians and Eastern Europeans in the Hollywood area.

In the 1970s Monterey Park was the major port of Chinese entry into the "Valley." At that time the city held many attractions for the newcomers: a location near the old, congested Chinatown, an established Asian population, and relatively new and affordable residential and commercial property—all vigorously marketed in Taiwan and Hong Kong by enterprising Chinese real estate and business interests who saw a future in a convenient, pleasant, and affordable suburb.

Immigrants gave us many reasons for coming to Monterey Park and the San Gabriel Valley, calling it a good place to invest capital and to raise and educate children; a familiar "Chinese" environment; and a ref-