

## The First Suburban Chinatown: The Remaking of Monterey Park, California

*Timothy P. Fong*

### **A New and Dynamic Community**

On an early morning walk to Barnes Memorial Park, one can see dozens of elderly Chinese performing their daily movement exercises under the guidance of an experienced leader. Other seniors stroll around the perimeter of the park; still others sit on benches watching the activity around them or reading a Chinese-language newspaper.

By now children are making their way to school, their backpacks bulging with books. They talk to each other in both English and Chinese, but mostly English. Many are going to Ynez Elementary, the oldest school in town.

When a nearby coin laundry opens its doors for business, all three television sets are turned on: one is tuned to a Spanish novella, another to a cable channel's Chinese newscast, and the third to Bryant Gumbel and the *Today* show.

Up the street from the park a home with a small stone carved Buddha and several stone pagodas in the well-tended front yard is an attractive sight. The large tree that provides afternoon shade for the house has a yellow rib-

bon tied around its trunk, a symbol of support for American troops fighting in the Persian Gulf. On the porch an American flag is tied to a crudely constructed flagpole. Next to it, taped to the front door, Chinese characters read "Happiness" and "Long Life" to greet visitors.

These sights and sounds are of interest not because they represent the routine of life in an ethnic neighborhood but because they signal the transformation of an entire city. Monterey Park, California, a rapidly growing, rapidly changing community of 60,000 residents, is located just eight miles east of downtown Los Angeles. An influx of immigrants primarily from Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the People's Republic of China has made Monterey Park the only city in the continental United States the majority of whose residents are of Asian background. According to the 1990 census, Asians make up 56 percent of the city's population, followed by Hispanics with 31 percent, and whites with 12 percent.<sup>1</sup>

In the early 1980s Monterey Park was nationally recognized for its liberal attitude toward newcomers. In fact, on June 13, 1983,

*Time* magazine featured a photograph of the city council as representative of a successful suburban melting pot. The caption read, "Middle-class Monterey Park's multiethnic city council: two Hispanics, a Filipino, a Chinese, and, in the rear, an Anglo."<sup>2</sup> Another national public relations coup came in 1985 when the National Municipal League and the newspaper *USA Today* named Monterey Park an "All-America City" for its programs to welcome immigrants to the community.<sup>3</sup> Nicknamed "City with a Heart," it took great pride in being a diverse and harmonious community. But despite these accolades, there were signs that the melting pot was about to boil over.

Tensions had begun to simmer with the arrival in the late 1970s of Chinese immigrants, many of whom were affluent and well educated. New ethnic-oriented businesses sprang up to accommodate them: nearly all the business signs on Atlantic Boulevard, the city's main commercial thoroughfare, conspicuously displayed Chinese characters with only token English translations. In 1985, the same year Monterey Park received its "All-America" award, some three thousand residents signed a petition attempting to get an "Official English" initiative on the municipal ballot; a local newspaper printed an article accusing the Chinese of being bad drivers; and cars displayed bumper stickers asking, "Will the Last American to Leave Monterey Park Please Bring the Flag?"<sup>4</sup>

In April 1986 the two Latinos and the Chinese American on the city council were defeated in their bids for reelection. Voted into office were three white candidates, one a proponent of controlled growth, the other two closely identified with the official-English movement in Monterey Park and the state. In June the new council passed Resolution 9004, which, among other things, called for English to be the official language of the United States of America.<sup>5</sup> Though the resolution was purely symbolic and carried no legal weight, it was immediately branded as a deliberate

slap at the city's Chinese and Latino population. Undaunted, the council continued to take controversial actions that critics labeled "anti-Chinese," among them adopting a broad moratorium on new construction and firing the city planning commission that had approved many Chinese-financed developments. But it was rejection of the plans proposed by a Taiwanese group to build a senior housing project that prompted a rare display of public protest by the usually apolitical Chinese community. Four hundred people, mostly elderly Chinese, marched to City Hall carrying American flags and signs reading, "Stop Racism," "We Are Americans Too," and "End Monterey Park Apartheid."<sup>6</sup>

These high-profile controversies, lasting throughout the 1980s were not isolated or incidental cases of cultural conflict. Indeed, events in this community have received publicity in local, national, and even international media; recently, scholars too have become interested in Monterey Park, focusing primarily on ethnic politics and race relations.<sup>7</sup> Close study of the community is important for several reasons. To begin with, Monterey Park's Chinese residents reflect the changing pattern of Chinese immigration nationwide. Chinese newcomers to Monterey Park and elsewhere are not analogous to the historically persecuted and oppressed male laborers who came to this country in the mid-nineteenth century; they are men and women generally much better educated and more affluent than either their Chinese predecessors or their white counterparts.<sup>8</sup> Further, similar demographic and economic changes are occurring not just in Monterey Park but throughout southern California's San Gabriel Valley and Orange County, and in the northern California cities of San Francisco, Mountain View, and San Jose. Increasing Chinese influence is felt also in New York City's boroughs of Manhattan and Queens (particularly Flushing), in Houston, Texas, and Orlando, Florida. Outside the United States, recent examples of a rapid in-

flux of Chinese people and capital are found in Sydney, Australia, and in Vancouver and Toronto, Canada.<sup>9</sup>

Next, because demographic change and economic development issues have created a complex controversy in Monterey Park, the intersection of ethnic, racial, and class conflict shows up quite clearly there. One prominent aspect of the social, economic, and political dynamics in Monterey Park is the popular call for controlled growth combined with a narrow nativist, anti-Chinese, anti-immigrant tone in debates that crossed ethnic lines throughout the community. And again, these developments too are relevant nationwide, occurring as they did at a time of increasing concern over immigration: over statistics showing that almost 90 percent of all legal immigrants coming to the United States since 1981 have been from non-European countries,<sup>10</sup> and over the numbers of undocumented immigrants crossing the southern U.S. borders. Documented and undocumented immigrants are rapidly changing the face of many urban centers.

Finally, the conflicts in Monterey Park took place in a period of increased anti-Asian sentiment and violence. Debate occasioned by the large trade deficit between the United States and Japan, suspicion raised by large Asian investments throughout the nation, and envy generated by repeated headlines about Asian superachievers in education all fueled the fires of resentment throughout the 1980s. The 1982 killing of Vincent Chin in Detroit, a widely cited act of anti-Asian violence, prompted a U.S. Commission on Civil Rights investigation.<sup>11</sup> The commission concluded that the upswing in animosity toward Asians reflected a perception that all Asian Americans, immigrants, and refugees are "foreigners" and as such are responsible for the economic woes of this country.<sup>12</sup>

This study of Monterey Park examines the evolution of conflict in the city and locates the beginnings of its recovery from internal strife and unwanted negative media atten-

tion. I argue that what was generally seen by the media and outsiders as a "racial" conflict was in fact a class conflict. At the same time, I demonstrate the highly charged saliency of ethnicity and race in the political arena and show how they were used to obscure class interests and to further political interests.

### Effects of Chinese Immigration

As the influx of Chinese to Monterey Park began, most community leaders and residents compared the newcomers with the American-born Japanese *nisei* who had moved to the community twenty years earlier and quickly assimilated. Together they welcomed the Chinese as yet another group of hard-working people who would naturally be more than happy to settle into the established wholesome life of the community. But because these Chinese were new immigrants, expectations for their immediate assimilation proved unrealistic, and several areas of friction developed—involving business and social organizations, schools, and even supermarkets.

### Divided Organizations

When it became obvious that no one could stop the influx of Chinese immigrants to the community, Eli Isenberg wrote a conciliatory column in December 1977 titled, "A Call for Open Arms," which was later translated into Chinese and republished in the [Monterey Park] *Progress*:

Twenty years ago, Monterey Park became a prestige community for Japanese. At first they settled in Monterey Hills. Today they live throughout and are active in the community. They were invited and accepted invitations to become involved. Today George Ige is our mayor, Keiji Higashi, a past president of chamber of commerce, is president-elect of Rotary. Fifty other Japanese men and women serve on advisory boards and in other leadership roles.

Today we must offer the same hand of friendship to our new Chinese neighbors. They should be invited to join service clubs, serve on advisory boards, become involved in little theater and PTA. . . . To become and stay a good community, there must be a structured effort to assimilate all those who want to become a part of Monterey Park. The city itself should coordinate this effort through the community relations commission and call on all organizations in Monterey Park to play their part in offering a hand of friendship to our new neighbors.<sup>13</sup>

Isenberg may have written partly in response to the formation of an independent Monterey Park Chinese Chamber of Commerce in September 1977—much to the chagrin of the original chamber. A great deal of animosity and criticism were leveled at this separate group for their reluctance to cooperate with established merchants. Shortly after Isenberg's column appeared, a series of meetings between the two groups resulted in the admission of the Chinese organization to the regular city Chamber of Commerce and the formation of a new Chinese American committee. "Helping keep the doors open was Fred Hsieh," recalls Isenberg. "Fred played an important role in maintaining an integrated Monterey Park Chamber of Commerce."<sup>14</sup>

After the proposed "Chinatown theme" was rejected in 1978, however, some dissatisfied Chinese business people resurrected the idea of a separate Chinese business organization and grumbled about other aspects of their chamber membership. For one thing, few of the Chinese businessmen spoke much English and could understand little of what was being said during meetings. Chinese merchants also resented having to seek chamber approval for business decisions; they wanted more autonomy. Furthermore, unlike Frederic Hsieh, most of the Chinese saw little to be gained by interacting with established merchants who, they felt, were antagonistic. Though they remained in the

chamber, the tension was not resolved, and flare-ups periodically occurred.

The Lions Club was even less successful at amalgamating with the newcomers. In the early 1980s an ad hoc group of Chinese asked Lions Club International to charter the Little Taipei Lions Club in Monterey Park. Given the historical prestige of the Lions Club in Monterey Park, its aging and dwindling membership was embarrassed by the formation of a separate club. Although they formally voted to sponsor the Chinese Lions organization in 1985, there was a great deal of reluctance. "The effort to recreate Little Taipei in Southern California," says Joseph Graves, was "unfortunate": "We would infinitely rather they had joined the existing, strong, long-time club with traditions." Graves spoke with pride of the original club's accomplishments, such as "screening all the children's eyes in Monterey Park. . . . [And] it looks like about 50 percent to 60 percent are Oriental."<sup>15</sup>

The projects of the Little Taipei Lions Club have been admirable, as well. Twice a year, during Chinese New Year's Day and on Thanksgiving, it sponsors a free lunch for senior citizens in Monterey Park's Langley Center, and it has raised considerable money for various non-profit organizations in the community—for example, making major donations to the city's public library to purchase Chinese-language books. But Graves objects that the Little Taipei Lions Club just gives out money rather than organizing work projects: "The Lions Club believed in the idea of going down and pouring cement to build a Memorial Bowl, or hammering nails to the roof of the pavilion at the park," he insists. "As older members, we look down our noses at any organization that doesn't get their hands dirty."<sup>16</sup>

In the mid-1980s the Monterey Park Kiwanis Club refused to sponsor a separate Chinese chapter, but one was formed anyway. To persistent rumors that a Chinese Rotary Club would soon be organized as well,

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long-time Rotary member Eli Isenberg responded in 1985: “Apartheid, whether in South Africa or in service clubs in Monterey Park, is a giant step back.” In a tone quite different from that of his 1977 “Call for Open Arms,” he continued: “Asians do not have a Constitutional right to form service clubs where they will be comfortable with members of their kind. All service clubs, from their international, should ban this happening. Provided, of course, that the Anglo clubs are willing to accept Asians as is the case in Monterey Park.”<sup>17</sup>

Little Taipei Lions Club members interviewed during their Thanksgiving day luncheon in 1990, however, denied that they are separatist. While passing out plates of turkey and trimmings to senior citizens, many said they meant no disrespect toward the established Lions Club and had no intention of competing with it in service to the community. As a master of ceremonies in the background called out winning door prize numbers in both English and Chinese, one member asserted that there was plenty of room for both clubs. Another member found nothing surprising about preferring to be with people his own age who spoke his language: “What is wrong with a service club that happens to be sensitive and in touch with the Chinese community?” Angered by any perception that the Little Taipei Lions Club serves only the Chinese, he added: “Look around you. There are lots of different people here. We happily serve them [all]. . . . But we do things for the Chinese in this city that no one else would.”<sup>18</sup>

### ***Bilingual Education***

The impact of the newcomers on the local schools also generated a great deal of tension. Brightwood Elementary School is located in the heart of one of the most heavily concentrated Asian sections in Monterey Park (census tract 4820.02), and surrounded by well maintained middle-class homes built in the

1950s. In early 1978 a Chinese bilingual education plan initiated at Brightwood School opened what the PTA president called “a bucket of worms.”<sup>19</sup>

On January 21, 1974, the United States Supreme Court had ruled in the landmark *Lau v. Nichols* case that the San Francisco Unified School District had failed to provide necessary assistance to nearly 2,000 Chinese American students who did not speak English. The district was ordered to implement “appropriate relief,” subject to approval by the court. This precedent-setting case established bilingual education in public schools for students who speak limited or no English.<sup>20</sup>

In 1976 the school district of which Brightwood was a part was cited by the Department of Health, Education and Welfare’s Office of Civil Rights for having an inadequate English-as-a-second language (ESL) program. The department ruled that affirmative steps should be taken to correct the language deficiency of many minority children, in order to give them equal educational opportunity. The district complied the following year with a Spanish bilingual program in elementary and secondary schools and planned to phase in a Chinese bilingual program in 1978.

The proposal divided the Brightwood School—which was 70 percent Asian at the time—along English- and non-English-speaking lines. The plan called for all students from kindergarten to third grade to be taught in Chinese *and* English. Opposition to the program was led by American-born parents of Japanese and Chinese ancestry who were fearful that implementation would impede their children’s educational progress in the future. Some threatened to take their children out of Brightwood and place them in private schools, or move them out of the district entirely. Supporters of the plan, mostly immigrant parents, welcomed bilingual education because they believed it would help their children maintain their native language

and provide them with emotional and psychological support and the acceptance they needed within a new environment. A small third group of more moderate parents supported bilingual education but wanted the district to consider a "transitional" program that would instruct children in their native language but at the same time teach them enough English to allow their eventual transfer to a regular classroom.

During meetings to discuss the plan, the debate became intense. "Let them talk English," cried out one angry mother. "Why don't they leave the whole damn school as it is?"<sup>21</sup> Eventually, even supporters of the program asked the school board to delay implementation until the district could provide parents with more information and options. The delay was granted, and the bilingual program at Brightwood School did not start until early the following year. The result of months of meetings by the Brightwood Bilingual Committee turned out to be a much weaker variation of the original plan. Only one second grade class offered Chinese bilingual instruction; other Chinese students were taught English by "traveling teachers" at the parents' request.

### **Asian Markets**

The prominence of Chinese-owned and -operated businesses in town became an even greater source of resentment. Non-Asians in Monterey Park commonly complain that Chinese merchants quickly replaced many established businesses and catered almost exclusively to an Asian and Chinese-speaking clientele. The best examples are food stores and eateries. Chinese have taken over all but two of the town's major chain supermarkets. Bok choy is more common than lettuce in produce departments, and dim sum and tea more readily available than a hamburger and coffee in the restaurants.

The first Asian grocery in Monterey Park was opened in 1978 by Wu Jin Shen, a former

stockbroker from Taiwan. Wu's Diho Market proved to be an immediate success because the owner hired workers who spoke both Cantonese and Mandarin, and sold such popular items as preserved eggs and Taiwan's leading brand of cigarettes. Wu built the Diho Market into a chain of stores with 400 employees and \$30 million in sales.<sup>22</sup> Likewise, the Hong Kong Supermarket and the Ai Hoa, started in Monterey Park, were so successful that today they operate satellite stores throughout the San Gabriel Valley.

In Monterey Park there are now half a dozen large Asian supermarkets and about a dozen medium-sized stores. Their proprietors also lease out small spaces to immigrant entrepreneurs who offer videos, newspapers, baked goods, tea, ginseng, and herbs. Together, these enterprises attract Chinese and other Asian residents in large numbers to shop for the kinds of groceries unavailable or overpriced in "American" chain stores: fifty-pound sacks of rice, "exotic" fruits and vegetables, pig parts (arranged in piles of ears, snouts, feet, tails, and innards, as well as buckets of fresh pork blood), live fish, black-skinned pigeon, and imported canned products used in Chinese, Vietnamese, Indonesian, Thai, Philippine, and Japanese menus. In these markets, Chinese is the dominant language of commerce, and much of the merchandise is unfamiliar to non-Asian shoppers.

### **Growth and Resentment**

For many residents, the redevelopment and replacement of businesses in the Garvey-Garfield district, along Atlantic Boulevard, and throughout other areas in the city seemed sudden and dramatic. In January 1979, under the headline "Monterey Park Is Due for Big Facelift," the *Monterey Park Progress* reported that a northern portion of Atlantic Boulevard was set to "be transformed so it's unrecognizable." Construction there

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was to include the completion of a shopping center, office, and theater complex developed by the Kowin Development Company; ground-breaking for a new office building at the north-east corner of Atlantic and Newmark Avenue; and a hillside condominium project on the west side of Atlantic Boulevard. The article went on to state with great anticipation that "a large international concern" planned to "locate its international service center in Monterey Park," that substantial construction in anticipation of new tenants was to be done at McCaslin Industrial Park in the eastern section of town, and that several street and park improvement projects were in the works. In addition, a major city-sponsored Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) project would erect a new civic center complex and make necessary improvements on a senior center, a school cafeteria, a community center, and the municipal library.<sup>23</sup>

Between the influx of new Chinese immigrants, the infusion of large amounts of capital, the rapid introduction of Chinese-owned and -operated businesses, and the disruptions caused by construction crews tearing up the city and starting new projects, rumblings of discontent among long-time established residents became quite audible.

### **"I Don't Feel at Home Anymore!"**

At first the new Chinese-owned businesses seemed novel, innocuous, even humorous. "The gag was that if it wasn't a bank, it was going to be a real estate office, or another Chinese restaurant," says Lloyd de Llamas.<sup>24</sup> But as these and other Chinese businesses proliferated rapidly from 1978 on—taking over previously established merchants, displaying large Chinese-language signs, and seeming to cater only to a Chinese-speaking clientele—residents became increasingly hostile.

The famous Laura Scudder potato chip factory, converted into a Safeway store in the 1960s, became a bustling Chinese supermar-

ket. Frederic Hsieh bought the Edwards Theater and began showing Chinese-language movies; when people complained he added such English-language films as *Gone with the Wind*, *Doctor Zhivago*, and *Ryan's Daughter* to the afternoon repertoire. Even the locally revered Garvey Hardware Store was sold to new Chinese owners who divided the premises into mini-shops, relegating the much-reduced hardware department to the back of the building. Kretz Motorcycle, Paris' Restaurant, and the Midtown Pharmacy were similarly redeveloped, engendering resentment among many residents, particularly older whites. For "old-timers" the loss of a familiar business could be akin to the loss of an old friend. "Just a few years before they sold Paris' Restaurant I walked in there for lunch alone," remembers Ed Rodman, "and . . . there wasn't a single person in there that I knew by name! That describes the changes in Monterey Park."<sup>25</sup>

Such losses were compounded when many long-time residents felt they were not welcomed by new businesses because they were not Chinese. Avanelle Fiebelkorn told the *Los Angeles Times*: "I go to the market and over 65 percent of the people there are Chinese. I feel like I'm in another country. I don't feel at home anymore." Emma Fry agreed: "I feel like a stranger in my own town. You can't talk to the newcomers because many of them don't speak English, and their experiences and viewpoints are so different. I don't feel like I belong anymore. I feel like I'm sort of intruding."<sup>26</sup>

Joseph Graves particularly remembers an incident that occurred in the late 1970s when he was a member of the Monterey Park Chamber of Commerce. A group of visiting dignitaries from Taiwan asked the chamber whether a statue of Confucius could be built in one of the parks to remind young Chinese to respect and honor his teachings. Graves had no objection but told them that "the people coming over here ought to be building Statues of Liberty all over town." Graves, who

was born in Monterey Park the year the city was incorporated, continues to live there and says he harbors no resentment toward the Chinese. "I ride my bike everywhere and I see all these Chinese people out there taking their walks. They are so warm and friendly. How can you end up with anger? And yet, [if] I look at something they're doing that forces me to change, then I can be temporarily angry. I reserve the right to be temporarily angry as long as I don't nurse grievances."<sup>27</sup>

Others, however, *have* nursed grievances, and white flight has been the most obvious reaction to the changes in the community. While the Asian population in Monterey Park has grown and the Latino population has remained relatively stable, the white population has plummeted. In 1960 the 32,306 white residents made up 85 percent of the population; by 1990 the number of whites had dropped to 16,245, or just 12 percent. When former Monterey Park resident Frank Rizzo moved out, he cited the large condominium complexes on either side of his house and the people in them as reasons he could no longer stay. Prior to the influx of Chinese, Rizzo said, his neighborhood had been a quiet and friendly block of mostly single-family homes with expansive yards. But his new neighbors lived in large extended families in cramped quarters, spoke little English, and seemed unwilling to give up their traditions and settle into an American way of life. Rizzo, who sold his home to a Chinese developer, was emphatic about leaving Monterey Park: "What I might do is hang a little American flag on my truck and drive through town on my way out and wave goodbye to all my old friends. . . . I'm moving far away from here."<sup>28</sup>

Latinos in Monterey Park too were concerned that they were losing the integrated community they thought they'd moved into. David Barron has lived in the city since 1964 and raised his family there. Previously, he attended nearby East Los Angeles Community College and California State University, Los

Angeles. He still remembers when Monterey Park was referred to as the "Mexican Beverly Hills." Fluent in Spanish and proud of his heritage, Barron thought he had found the ideal integrated community. He is still involved in many of the city's social and civic activities and has no immediate plans to move, but he misses the diversity he initially found in the town. "I would like to see a balance maintained," he explains. "I cannot live in a mono-ethnic community. I wouldn't want to live in an all-Hispanic . . . or all-Chinese . . . or all-white community. I want to live in a mixed community."<sup>29</sup>

Similar sentiments were expressed by Fernando Zabala, a hair stylist who grew up in East Los Angeles and also found Monterey Park a stepping-stone out of the barrio. "It was very important that my children grow up in a racially diverse community," Zabala said. "When we moved to Monterey Park, we had a little bit of everybody: whites, blacks, Latinos, and some Chinese and Japanese. But we lost that mix. In my neighborhood alone, it went from twenty-five Latino families to three."<sup>30</sup> Unlike Barron, Zabala sold his house and moved out.

One woman, who asked not to be identified, said that she was one of the first Mexican Americans to move into a new hillside housing tract in Monterey Park in the late 1950s and that she had worked very hard to integrate into the community. Like many whites, she expressed anxiety about the rapid change in the commercial areas in town: "It wasn't like one business changing at a time, it was like two or three at a time. When they put in the Diho [supermarket], that right away changed the appearance of Atlantic Boulevard." She recalled with particular sadness a Mexican restaurant she and her mother used to frequent. This small restaurant, greatly appreciated for its home-style cooking and family atmosphere, was forced to close when new owners bought the property. "The owner was very upset, and she put [up] a big sign. . . . 'I'm not leaving my friends because I



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Like the Latinos who had settled in Monterey Park, long-time Asian American residents had lived their entire lives believing in the "American Dream" that proclaimed just rewards for hard work and initiative. It was an affront to their sensibilities to see so many newcomers acquire the fruits of a material society seemingly without having to struggle. The newcomer Chinese were simply not playing by the rules of assimilation: they bought property, started businesses and banks, and built shopping malls as soon as they arrived—and many of them didn't even speak English! John Yee—whose great-great-grandfather had come to California during the gold rush, whose great-grandfather died building the transcontinental railroad, and whose grandfather and father owned a Chinese laundry business that served steel factory workers in Midland, Pennsylvania—is particularly articulate in this regard. "When I first came to L.A., I lived in Chinatown, went into the service, came out, worked in a lot of jobs, and step by step I moved to Monterey Park. It took how many years? Thirty, forty years? It seems like these immigrants . . . want to live in Monterey Park as soon as they get off the boat. Not the boat, now they come by airplane. Give them another forty years, they'll be in Beverly Hills. I won't ever get to that point. . . . Maybe I'm jealous like everybody else."<sup>32</sup>

The resentment of the older Latinos and Asian Americans who had experienced racial segregation and witnessed the civil rights struggles of the 1960s also stemmed from a feeling that Monterey Park's new Chinese immigrants were taking for granted the equality won by the struggles of others. Yee says: "I don't mind the people too much, don't get me wrong; I am of Chinese descent. But the thing is, you get these people with this attitude. . . . they think [everything] was like this all the time. It wasn't. I hear people say, 'China got

strong and now the United States and the rest of the world has more respect for us.' Maybe so, but . . . if it wasn't for some of these guys [people of color born in the United States] who squawked about it, went into the service, these changes wouldn't happen. You got the blacks and Mexicans, they all helped change the government. . . . That attitude [among new Chinese immigrants] just burns me up."<sup>33</sup>

Particularly for Asian Americans born in the United States, the appearance of Chinese immigrants raised questions about their assumed assimilation and acceptance into American society. "When there were just Japanese people in Monterey Park, it was no problem because we were just like them [whites]," explains long-time resident Kei Higashi. "But now all of a sudden [with the arrival of the new immigrant Chinese] when we walk into a place and start talking perfect English, they [non-Asians] look at us like we're some foreign creature," he laughs. "That's what happened in Monterey Park."<sup>34</sup>

In the middle of all this are many of the Chinese immigrant professionals, who found themselves lumped together with the development- and business-oriented newcomers. Many express appreciation for the large Chinese population that makes them feel welcome, but at the same time, they say, had they wanted to live in a crowded, exclusively Chinese environment, they never would have left home. This is the case for Dr. Frances Wu, who moved to Monterey Park in 1971, after she was accepted in the doctoral program at the University of Southern California. Born and educated in China, Wu lived in Taiwan for four years following the Communist takeover; in 1953 she went to Canada to earn a master's degree from McGill University, then spent fifteen years in New York working in the Child Welfare Department.

When Wu came to southern California, she changed her social work specialty to gerontology, and shortly after earning her Ph.D. she started the Golden Age Village, a retirement center located in Monterey Park. Al-

though the project is open to all elderly people who qualify, Wu told the *Monterey Park Progress*, "My motivation was to develop a social program for elderly Chinese and we selected Monterey Park because of its growing Chinese population," as well as its uncongested, small-town atmosphere.<sup>35</sup> The overall design of the Golden Age Village is obviously Asian, with its curved roofs and a courtyard that features a babbling brook surrounded by a decorative Oriental-style garden. The majority of residents are retired Chinese, many of whom speak little or no English, and the communal food garden grows bok choy and Chinese parsley among other vegetables. But the serene environment that Wu found in Monterey Park and recreated at the Golden Age Village is threatened by what she considers too much growth too fast. "I would rather keep this community a bedroom community," she says. "For retired people, we like a quiet environment. . . . People describe Monterey Park as 'Little Taipei,' but Taipei is horrible. I don't want Monterey Park to be like that."<sup>36</sup>

## Notes

1. U.S. Bureau of the Census, "Monterey Park, City, California," 1990 Census of Population and Housing Summary Tape File 1, May 13, 1991.
2. Kurt Anderson, "The New Ellis Island: Immigrants from All Over Change the Beat, Bop, and Character of Los Angeles," *Time*, June 13, 1983, p. 21.
3. Several newspapers have incorrectly cited this honor as the "All-American" award. According to the official entry form, the term is "All-America."
4. Mike Ward, "Language Rift in 'All-American City,'" *Los Angeles Times*, November 13, 1985; Gordon Dillow, "Why Many Drivers Tremble on the Streets of Monterey Park," *Los Angeles Herald*, July 8, 1985; "English Spoken Here, OK?" *Time*, August 25, 1985.
5. Monterey Park City Council *Minutes*, June 2, 1986.
6. Mike Ward, "Racism Charged over Monterey Park Vote," *Los Angeles Times*, July 15, 1986; Ray Babcock, "'Sanctuary' Resolution Stays," *Monterey Park Progress*, July 16, 1986; Evelyn Hsu, "Influx of Asians Stirs Up L.A. Area's 'Little Taipei,'" *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 1, 1986.
7. See José Calderon, "Latinos and Ethnic Conflict in Suburbia: The Case of Monterey Park," *Latino Studies Journal* 1 (May 1990): 23-32; John Horton, "The Politics of Ethnic Change: Grass-Roots Response to Economic and Demographic Restructuring in Monterey Park, California," *Urban Geography* 10 (1989): 578-92; Don Nakanishi, "The Next Swing Vote? Asian Pacific Americans and California Politics," in *Racial and Ethnic Politics in California*, ed. Bryan O. Jackson and Michael D. Preston (Berkeley: University of California, Institute of Governmental Studies, 1991), pp. 25-54; Mary Pardo, "Identity and Resistance: Latinas and Grass-Roots Activism in Two Los Angeles Communities" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1990); Leland Saito, "Politics in a New Demographic Era: Asian Americans in Monterey Park, California" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1992); Charles Choy Wong, "Monterey Park: A Community in Transition" in *Frontiers of Asian American Studies*, ed. Gail M. Nomura, Russel Endo, Stephen H. Sumida, and Russell Leong (Pullman: Washington State University Press, 1989), pp. 113-26; Charles Choy Wong, "Ethnicity, Work, and Community: The Case of Chinese in Los Angeles" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1979).
8. U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *The Economic Status of Americans of Asian Descent: An Exploratory Investigation*, Publication no. 95 (Washington, D.C.: Clearinghouse, 1988), p. 109.
9. See Marshall Kilduff, "A Move to Ease Racial Tensions in S.F. Neighborhood," *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 11, 1986; Tim Fong, "The Success Stereotype Haunts Asian-Americans," *Sacramento Bee*, July 4, 1987; David Reyes, "'Asiantown'

Plan Taking Shape in Westminster," *Los Angeles Times*, March 22, 1987; "Chinese Enclaves Abound in New York," *Asian Week*, October 3, 1986; Kevin P. Helliker, "Chinatown Sprouts in and near Houston with Texas Flavor," *Wall Street Journal*, February 18, 1983; "\$50 Million 'Orlando Chinatown' Features Hotel-Retail Complex and 30 Restaurants," *AmeriAsian News*, March-April 1987; Russell Spurr, "Why Asians Are Going Down Under," *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 7, 1988; Howard Witt, "British Columbia's Anti-Asian Feelings Suddenly Surface," *Chicago Tribune*, February 5, 1989.

10. U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, *1989 Statistical Yearbook of the Immigration and Naturalization Service* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1990), p. xiv.

11. In June 1982 Vincent Chen, a Chinese American draftsman, was beaten to death by a Chrysler Motors supervisor and his stepson. One of the assailants was alleged to have yelled, "It's because of you motherfuckers we're out of work." The two men later confessed to the crime, were fined \$3,780 each, and placed on three years' probation. Neither spent a day in jail. See Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore* (Boston, Little, Brown, 1989), p. 481.

12. U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *Recent Activities against Citizens and Residents of Asian Descent*: Publication no. 88 (Washington, D.C.: Clearinghouse, 1986), p. 3.

13. Eli Isenberg, "A Call for Open Arms," *Monterey Park Progress*, December 7, 1977.

14. Interview with Eli Isenberg.

15. Interview with Joseph Graves.

16. Ibid.

17. Eli Isenberg, "It Seems to Me," *Monterey Park Progress*, February 27, 1985.

18. Fieldnotes from November 20, 1990.

19. Art Wong, "Bilingual Plan Opens Up 'Bucket of Worms,'" *Monterey Park Progress*, June 7, 1978.

20. L. Ling-chi Wang, "Lau v. Nichols: History of a Struggle for Equal and Quality Education," *Amerasia Journal* 2 (1974): 16-46.

21. Wong, "Bilingual Plan."

22. See Andrew Tanzer, "Little Taipei," *Forbes*, May 6, 1985, pp. 68-71; Mike Ward, "Cities Report Growth—and Some Losses—from Asian Business," *Los Angeles Times*, April 19, 1987; and Randy Hoder, "A Passion for Asian Foods," *Los Angeles Times*, June 5, 1991.

23. Malcolm Schwartz, "Monterey Park Is Due for Big Facelift in 1979," *Monterey Park Progress*, January 3, 1979.

24. Interview with Lloyd de Llamas by Tim Fong, for the Monterey Park Oral History Project, sponsored by the Monterey Park Historical Heritage Commission, March 29, April 13, and May 11, 1990.

25. Interview with Ed Rodman by Tim Fong, for the Monterey Park Oral History Project, sponsored by the Monterey Park Historical Heritage Commission, October 17 and 24, 1990.

26. Mark Arax, "Selling Out, Moving On," *Los Angeles Times*, April 12, 1987.

27. Interview with Joseph Graves.

28. Arax, "Selling Out, Moving On."

29. Interview with David Barron by Tim Fong, for the Monterey Park Oral History Project, sponsored by the Monterey Park Historical Heritage Commission, October 9, 1990.

30. Mark Arax, "Nation's 1st Suburban Chinatown," *Los Angeles Times*, April 6, 1987.

31. Fieldnotes from August 16, 1990.

32. Interview with John Yee by Tim Fong, for the Monterey Park Oral History Project, sponsored by the Monterey Park Historical Heritage Commission, May 31 and June 4, 1990.

33. Ibid.

34. Interview with Kei Higashi by Tim Fong, for the Monterey Park Oral History Project, sponsored by the Monterey Park Historical Heritage Commission, May 7 and 30, 1990.

35. "Second Housing Project for Seniors on Horizon," *Monterey Park Progress*, Sept 13, 1978.

36. Interview with Dr. Frances Wu by Tim Fong, for the Monterey Park Oral History Project, sponsored by the Monterey Park Historical Heritage Commission, June 22 and July 6, 1990.

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- San Francisco Chronicle*, August 11, 1986-December 7, 1988.
- Wall Street Journal*, February 18, 1983.

## Fong:

1. What was ironic about Monterey Park, California, receiving the "All-America City" award from the National Municipal League and *USA Today*?
2. Discuss what Fong describes as ethnic tensions used to obscure class and political interests.