

**The Ties that Bind:
Asian American Communities without “Ethnic Spaces” in Southeast Michigan**

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INTRODUCTION

According to the 2000 census, over 12 million Asian Americans, almost 70 percent of them either immigrants who came to the U.S. after 1970 or their children, comprised an ethnically and socioeconomically diverse population that was more regionally dispersed throughout the U.S. than ever before. (Lai and Arguelles, 2003). Despite these transitions and increasing heterogeneity, discourses about Asian American communities have focused on ethnic enclaves such as Chinatowns, Koreatowns, and Little Saigons where coethnic residents, businesses, services, institutions and organizations exist and interact in urban or suburban physical spaces of the bicoastal United States (Fong, 1994; Li, 1999; Zhou and Bankston, 1988). According to Kathleen Wong (Lau), these tangible markers tied to space are often privileged as authentic Asian American communities while those without demographic concentrations and geographically bound enclaves are “less advanced” communities; as a result, “[w]hat is not recognized in the literature is the ‘localness’ of this production.” [1997:83].

Through her study of the St. Louis Chinese community, Huping Ling (2005) traces its transformation from “Hop Alley” to a “cultural community,” a shift attributed to the growth of professional and self-employed Chinese population from Mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, as well as other parts of the U.S. in the post civil rights era. Like other Chinatowns, Hop Alley began as a racially segregated area in the 1860s; it was razed in 1966 to create a parking lot for Busch Stadium and in its place, a new, suburban, “not quite visible yet highly active and productive Chinese American community” has developed (2). The cultural community model, according to Ling, “serve(s) to explain why new suburban Chinese communities have emerged, have scattered, and have blended with other ethnic groups” (12) as it may lack demographic concentration and physical boundaries but is defined by common cultural practices and beliefs that its members endeavor to maintain and transmit to others, especially their children. Vo and Bonus (2002) argue for an expansion of the bicoastal U.S. ethnic enclave model that takes into account not only the historical roots but also the fluid, transitioning, and complex “intersections and divergences” of contemporary Asian American communities that form across physical, social, and electronic sites. Ling’s cultural community model takes into account the unique attributes of a local and regional space – St. Louis and the Midwest – that diverge from the ethnic community models on either U.S. coasts.

This paper examines how Asian Americans in Michigan – in particular, southeast Michigan – constructed, maintained, and transformed their sense of community in places without a “critical mass” population and ethnic enclaves.ⁱ In 2000, Asian Americans comprised about 2.1 percent of the total Michigan population (Lai and Arguelles, 2003).ⁱⁱ My findings show that the number,

variety, and persistence of Asian/Asian American ethnic organizations and associations in Michigan refute the bicoastal model that without geographically and physically discernible enclaves, a community is underdeveloped or does not exist. Although churches, temples, and college campuses do act as spatially anchored examples of communities for their members, Michigan Asian American communities do not resemble traditional ethnic enclave models that have dominated the study of racial/ethnic communities in the U.S. The primacy of organizations, associations and social networks, both formal and informal, indicate that despite dispersed patterns of residential and ethnic business/services, respondents make an effort to create a community with coethnics and to a lesser degree, other Asian ethnic groups, in response to political issues that are perceived to affect Asian Americans as a racialized group.

RACE, SPACE, AND REGION: ASIAN AMERICANS AND THE MIDWEST

As late as the 1940s, 90 percent of Asian Americans lived along the West Coast and in Hawai'i but by 2000, this percentage had dropped to 48 percent. As more Asian Americans migrate to and settle in "unexpected places," scholars, especially those "East of California", have critiqued the West Coast-centric – and in particular, California-centric – history of Asian American Studies, examining histories and emerging community formations beyond well-known ethnic enclaves (Okimoto, 2001; Sumida, 1997).

The U.S. Census Bureau defines the Midwest as a combination of two subdivided regions: the East North Central states – Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin – and the West North Central states – Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, and Kansas. The Midwest, dubbed the "heartland" and the center of America, has remained in the margins of Asian American history despite the significant role it played in the destabilization of its communities in the twentieth century. According to Victor Jew (2003), the Midwest served as "a good place to disperse two waves of Asian American population 'unsettlements'": first, in the 1940s, when the War Relocation Authority deliberately resettled incarcerated Japanese Americans throughout the Midwest in an attempt to abolish pre-war social ties and institutions and second, after 1975, when federal departments and agencies created a Southeast Asian diaspora throughout the Midwest and the nation in order to diffuse the usage of economic and social support services. With most Asian Americans living in Hawai'i and the West Coast, the federal government imagined the Midwest as a place where Asian Americans could be scattered and become "un-Asian" (Jew, 2003; Sumida, 1997). Yet, the transplanted population and Asian Americans who were *already* living in the Midwest prior to these historical moments, reconstituted their lives and communities.

Additionally, since the passage of the Immigration Act of 1965, Asian Americans have migrated to and settled in the Midwest for educational and employment opportunities available at higher education institutions, industries, and/or through family sponsorship (Jew, 2003). As a result, 53.7 percent of the Asian only population residing in Midwestern states in 1999 had a college bachelor's degree or more, compared to 44.1 percent of the Asian only population in the U.S. More than a quarter of the Midwestern Asian only population (25.7 percent) had a graduate/professional

degree or more, compared to 17.4 percent of the U.S. Asian population. Michigan's Asian-only population exhibited the highest percentage of bachelor degrees or higher (61 percent) and graduate/professional degrees or more (32.3 percent) among Midwestern states (Lai and Arguelles, 2003). For those who reported their background as one race only, Michigan's population comprised of 80.2% non-Hispanic Whites, 14.2% African Americans, 0.6% American Indians, and 1.8 % Asians in 2000. Combined with the growing yet small percentage of Asian Americans residing in the Midwest, these demographic trends have been celebrated as the successful socioeconomic integration of Asian Americans, particularly first-generation professionals, in the perpetuation of the "model minority myth" (Anderson and Smith, 1983; Glazier and Helweg, 2001). According to Portes and Rumbaut (1990), immigrants of color from these backgrounds tend to assimilate more quickly into the mainstream. Others charge that these aggregated demographic trends continue to marginalize the real socioeconomic disparities that exist within the heterogeneous Asian American population and dismiss issues of racial discrimination, including hate crimes and employment discrimination, that Asian Americans experience regardless of education, occupation, and income (Wu, 2001; Zia, 2000).

In order to study how U.S. regionalism and racial formations intersect in everyday lives, I interviewed 40 Asian Americans (20 women and 20 men) between 18 and 70 years of age who consider Michigan their home state through immigration, migration, or birth. Potential respondents were contacted via snowball sampling through various community organizations, campus organizations, and personal references to access different social networks. Interviews lasted between 45 minutes to three and a half hours. The respondents' ethnic backgrounds were Chinese, Filipino, Hmong, Indian, Japanese, Korean, Taiwanese, and Vietnamese. Most were first-generation (n=17) or 1.5 (defined as those born outside the U.S. but immigrated in early childhood before the age of 12) and second-generation (n=21). More than half (n=23) of the respondents were born outside the U.S. and seventeen were born in the U.S.; twelve were born in Michigan.ⁱⁱⁱ

The interviews were conducted in 1998 and 1999; all respondent names in this study are pseudonyms. Respondents were asked about their immigration and settlement histories in Michigan, social networks, neighborhoods in which they lived, ethnic and cultural practices in their lives, and race relations. Therefore, this paper focuses on the sense and definitions of ethnic and pan-Asian communities for Michigan residents who grew up or settled in Michigan from the 1940s throughout the 1990s. Since the interviews were conducted, several ethnic communities have built new community centers in southeast Michigan to provide spaces for meetings, classes, and special events; for example, the Philippine American Community Center of Michigan (PACCM), located in Southfield, was inaugurated September 2001 after more than two decades of planning and fundraising while the Association of Chinese Americans (ACA) opened a Chinese Community Center in Madison Heights in 2005. The Boggs Center's Detroit Asian Youth Project raises social consciousness among Asian American youth in Detroit. Asian Village, a multi-million dollar riverfront shopping and dining center conceptualized and designed by Korean American Detroitier Dominic Pangbom, was scheduled to open January 2007. There is a continued emphasis on organizations and social networks rather than traditional models of ethnic enclaves to create and sustain Asian American communities as the interviews revealed.

DEFINING COMMUNITY

Robert Nisbet (1966) defines community as one that “encompasses all forms of relationship which are characterized by a high degree of personal intimacy, emotional depth, moral commitment, social cohesion, and continuity in time.” It is this concept of personal intimacy, as opposed to merely fulfilling social roles, which sets the community apart from society. Drawing upon Fredrik Barth (1967)’s theory of ethnic boundaries, A. P. Cohen (1985) emphasizes the construction of community as symbolic boundaries of similarities and differences created by the ingroup members to separate themselves from outside members. Noting the unstable and imprecise nature of these symbolic boundaries, Cohen urges social scientists to understand how members observe and define these “subjective” but “not contentless” attachments to their community. Using Cohen’s definition of a symbolic community, I examine the contents and boundaries of Asian American communities as constructed by the respondents.

Although stores providing Chinese goods and services were in business as early as 1918 catering to the early Chinese settlers who worked as houseboys, servants, cooks, and operated laundries and restaurants in the area, Detroit’s Chinatown, located around Third and Michigan Avenues, thrived between 1940s and 1960s (Anderson and Smith, 1983). During the urban renewal in the 1960s, Chinatown was razed in order to construct expressways and parking lots – and was moved to the intersection of Cass and Peterboro.^{iv} The historic Chinatown remains but ethnic establishments and services are scattered throughout the suburbs as well as across the national border in the city of Windsor, Ontario, Canada. What do Asian American communities look like when not anchored by spatialized enclaves? First-generation Korean American Hyun Jung Yoon who has lived in Michigan since the late 1970s described the Korean American community in Michigan as:

...something like the Korean Society, when people in this area all get together... meeting Koreans, or observing [Korean] Independence Day –we don’t have an area such as Chinatown, but something like the Korean American Service Committee, or the Korean Society sponsoring a senior citizens banquet – just Koreans getting together and we can do something – so I think that formulates the Korean American community.^v

Thirty-six of the forty informants (90%) agreed with Yoon, commenting that an Asian American and/or an Asian ethnic community exists in Michigan; community, however, came in different forms and locations. Most first-generation respondents and those who were college students at the time of the interview (predominantly second-generation) socialized exclusively through their ethnic ties and communities but interacted with other Asian Americans within political and economic contexts. Second-generation respondents, most of whom grew up as one of the few Asians in

predominantly white or black neighborhoods, defined ethnic communities through their parents' associations, networks, and involvements in their youth and constructed their own ethnic and panethnic communities largely through schools and faith-based institutions. Significantly, all eight who said that a *pan-Asian* community (rather than separate ethnic ones) existed in Michigan, cited their college campus (one with a "critical mass" of Asian American students) as the site of this Asian American community. As Kibria (2002) demonstrated in her study on second-generation Korean and Chinese Americans, the college setting provided an "official ideology of pan-Asianism": the Asian American panethnic identity constructed upon the premise of shared racial and political interests (Espiritu, 1992). The student body population, associations, Ethnic Studies, and student services (such as a multiethnic student resource center) emphasized a shared political identity. I begin the discussion of Asian American community as one constructed through associations and organizations.

ASSOCIATIONS AND ORGANIZATIONS

Ethnicity-based associations and organizations – often further subdivided by political, class, civic, social, cultural, business, professional, linguistic groups and interests – moved from location to location over the years, often following the homes of current leaders and members. Overall responses indicated that Michigan Asian Americans have been involved in a range of social, professional, and civic community organizations despite – or because of – their scattered residential patterns. For Janice Okada, the Detroit chapter of the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) served as the Japanese American community in the 1950s and 1960s. She had never met a Japanese American outside her own family until her parents took her to the JACL event, in which "the *Nisei* [second generation] families here had organized a youth group for all of the *Sansai* [third generation]." Jae Hong Park, a Michigan resident since the 1960s when he came to attend graduate school, helped found a Korean social organization, church, and language school and observed, "We don't have a Chinatown or an assembled Koreatown like Los Angeles or New York, but... Since we have first generation immigrants, we share a similar mission as a group of people."^{vi} According to Park, that shared mission is to support other coethnics in their businesses and civil rights, and provide the means for the second generation to learn their homeland culture and language.

Members and leaders created communities through events and activities through ethnic associations (e.g., Association of Chinese Americans, Korean Society of Greater Metropolitan Detroit, Indian Cultural Society, Lao-Hmong Community, Inc.). However, participants reported closer affinity and more frequent interactions with associations and organizations formed by ethnicity *and* additional similarities – in particular professional/occupational backgrounds and specific regional, language, and/or religious ties to their homeland for the first-generation respondents – (e.g., Detroit Chinese Business Association, Philippine Medical Association in Michigan, Philippine Nurses Association, Korean American Professionals in the Automotive Industry), a result of increasing ethnic, socioeconomic, and generational heterogeneity of Asian Americans due to

immigration and migration trends. Second-generation Chinese American Robin Yu said that referring to a Chinese community in the area was an inaccurate description, and that the “second-generation”, “mostly recent immigrants from the People’s Republic”, and “Taiwanese immigrants” created “multiple communities, and multiple organizations. So for the Chinese American community, it’s really disparate groups.”^{vii} Luis Delgado, who belonged to the Filipino umbrella organization in Michigan of approximately 48 organizations, described the Filipino American community in Michigan and throughout the U.S. as “fragmented,” saying, “We don’t have Chinatown and all that. So we’re scattered.”^{viii}

Respondents who lived in Detroit in the 1970s mentioned their or their parents’ involvement with coethnics, other Asians, and the dominant society through the International Institute located in downtown Detroit. The Institute was also a major sponsor of Detroit ethnic festivals that were held in the 1970s and the 1980s; Okada, Maria Cruz, Robin Yu, and Victor Yee all recalled volunteering at or attending Far Eastern Festivals, organized by Asian Indian, Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Korean and Pakistani community members.

Only one pan-Asian organization that is not college or university-affiliated was frequently mentioned as one that mobilized a panethnic Asian American community: American Citizens for Justice (now Asian American Center for Justice/Asian Citizens for Justice), formed in response to the 1982 murder of Vincent Chin (Espiritu, 1992; Zia, 2000). Many respondents had attended, or had been invited to annual ACJ fundraiser dinners due to their membership in ethnic associations and organizations; four were past or present ACJ board members. All college students and recent graduates mentioned ACJ, saying that they had heard about Chin’s death growing up or in Asian American Studies courses, events, and/or discussions. Despite the ongoing work of ACJ, Korean American Yumi Shin was concerned about declining community activism and support for political/civic organizations to address civil rights issues and educate the public and private sectors about Asian American cultures and histories in Michigan. Although ACJ still actively monitors civil rights violations and other hate crimes that target Asian Americans, respondents primarily identified it with the role it played in the Chin case and most were not active members of ACJ at the time of the interview.

In 2005, individuals and organizations formed the Asian Pacific American Caucus of One Michigan United, a statewide coalition to defeat Proposal 2, or the Michigan Civil Rights Initiative (MCRI), that sought to end state affirmative action programs; Proposal 2 passed with 58 percent of the votes in November 2006.

FAITH-BASED ETHNIC COMMUNITIES

For 18 out of 40 respondents, faith-based communities provided spaces, physical and social, to meet and interact with primarily coethnics. This was especially prominent among the Korean American respondents; all but one attended a Korean Protestant church and cited faith-based organizations (churches, council of churches, and campus ministries) as basis for their ethnic

community and solidarity, a phenomenon well-documented in Korean American communities across the U.S. (Hurh and Kim, 1990). They served as elders, deacons, and other lay leaders at their church, or were active members of their church and/or religious organizations, especially on college campuses.

One example that illustrated the importance of Korean churches was the observation of Korean Independence Day (August 15) that commemorates the end of Japanese colonization in 1945. First-generation immigrants (those who have been in the U.S. for decades to recent immigrants), international students, and non-Korean spouses of Korean Americans comprise the sociocultural organizations. Each year, they separately sponsor Independence Day picnics featuring speeches, Korean cultural performances, and Korean food. In 1999, the featured event at both picnics, however, was the sports tournament in which teams representing local churches competed for trophies. The conflation of ethnic social ethnic organizations and churches in the annual observation of the Korean Independence Day illustrates the overlapping boundaries of culture, nation, and religion, and how the predominantly Protestant Korean American population in southeastern Michigan induces ethnic identities. Multiple generations of Korean Americans and Koreans (primarily international students), organized by churches, gathered to observe a political national holiday (end of Japanese colonized rule) through a program of traditional Korean music, Korean food, and competitive sports.

Korean respondents also referred to the Michigan Council of Korean Churches (MCKC) as an example of ethnic community in Michigan. MCKC sponsors an annual weeklong summer youth retreat where college students – usually former youth retreat participants themselves – serve as counselors. College students and recent graduates cited campus Christian organizations such as Korea Campus Crusade for Christ (KCCC).

Non-Korean respondents also emphasized the role of faith-based institutions in their ethnic communities. Second-generation Kim Hoang observed the importance of the Catholic church among Vietnamese Americans in Lansing. Amit Jain, an Indian American college student, said he grew up as a part of two “strong communities” connected to his family’s regional origin and religious background, as “there’s always some sort of functions on the weekends, or always some sort of activities going on.”^{six} Vivek Mehta grew up attending a local Hindu temple with his family and planned to take Hindi classes there.

Churches and temples, and other faith-based communities emerged as creators and maintainers of community, culture, and identity for almost half of the respondents as they observed ethnic/national holidays, organized cultural activities, offered language, religious, and cultural classes, and provided a physical space and social networks for first-generation Asians and their children to interact with co-ethnics on a regular basis.

THE UNIVERSITY AS AN ASIAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY

Twelve respondents indicated that they or their family members (parent or spouse) graduated from a Michigan college or university and found jobs within the state. But it was especially the new

second-generation respondents – children of the international-students-turned-Michigan-residents – who found their sense of community on the university campus such as the University of Michigan – Ann Arbor. Asian Americans comprised 7.7 percent of city population of Ann Arbor in 1990, compared to the statewide 1.1 percent according to the 1990 Census. In 2000, Asian Pacific Americans comprised 13 percent of Ann Arbor’s population and the largest group of students of color at the University of Michigan (Lai and Arguelles, 2003).

First, they cited student organizations and social networks as creating a sense of community. Monica Shah served as an officer in both Indian and pan-Asian organizations. She observed, “there’s a huge, overall Asian one that’s really well knit, and everyone knows everyone...” although she felt more “comfortable” with her Indian American peers.^x Like Shah, Kathy Kim derived a stronger sense of affinity from coethnics: “Everyone kind of knows each other in this Korean circle; I don’t know how. You see them on the street, and maybe you don’t know them [well], but you know their name... Even though there are different Korean groups, I feel like we’re a part of one big community.”^{xi} For Shah and Kim, their closest friends and campus activities revolved around coethnic and religious organizations and social networks. Their pre-college involvement and ease with high school organizations, faith communities, and coethnic/Asian American peers resulted in an easier transition into participation in ethnic and panethnic organizations.

Respondents who grew up in predominantly white or black towns or cities described a less smooth transition into and identification with these communities. Chi Lee, a Hmong American junior, experienced “culture shock” when she arrived: “I’d never seen so many Asian people in my life – or white people.”^{xii} Allen Chuang, who grew up in a predominantly white town in mid-Michigan, did not make Asian American friends until someone invited him to an Asian American organization his junior year. Lee and Chuang eventually joined or formed student organizations with Asian Americans sharing similar interests; Lee joined a Hmong American and an Asian American women’s literary group while Chuang joined a Taiwanese American and a panethnic Asian American organizations.

Students also “became” Asian American through curriculum of Asian/Pacific American Studies inspired by student movements of the 1960s (Kibria, 2002). For Tae Young Han, the interconnection of intellectual texts and the primarily working-class, community-identified Asian American movements in the 1960s produced an Asian American consciousness that transcended the predominantly middle-class, professional Korean American families that he had grown up with in Michigan suburbs.^{xiii}

The university campus with its the web of student population, organizations, institutional arrangements (for example, offices and staff members who work with students of color and in areas of multiethnic diversity), and Asian American Studies programs, was one of the first places where second-generation Asian American respondents encountered the option to regularly, and even exclusively, interact with a coethnic or panethnic population on any basis. The numbers – Asian Americans were the largest group of students of color at the University of Michigan – resulted in racially and ethnically visible presence discernible to those who identified themselves as a part of

these communities and to those who criticized students (not just Asian Americans) for being too “cliquey” with people of their own racial/ethnic background.

Respondents tended to extol the racial, ethnic and international diversity of Ann Arbor and the University of Michigan – Ann Arbor, in comparison to the rest of the state and its institutions. Seema Shetty, for example, gave up a full scholarship at another state university to transfer to the University of Michigan where she heard “the term ‘Asian American’ for the first time. I guess that was the first time I developed this vocabulary, that I could have a different ethnicity and a different culture and still be considered American. . . .”^{xiv} Respondents of all generations pointed to Ann Arbor as a comfortable place to live, due to its “exceptional” mix of international and racial/ethnic populations; Ann Arbor residents and visitors alike also described Ann Arbor as distinctive due to the concentration of highly educated persons and professionals who moved to study, and/or work at the University and the surrounding industries.^{xv}

SOCIAL NETWORKS

The fourth example of communities without “ethnic space” was created through social networks of family and friends. In the 1950s, Philippines native Maria Cruz stopped to visit a friend in Michigan before she began graduate school. By the time she left Michigan, she had met and married her late husband, an “old-timer” or a “first canoe” Filipino, the first group of Filipinos to come to Michigan in the 1920s with the expansion of the Detroit automobile industry. She remembered that the “. . .the first Filipinos to Michigan, they were very close-knit. During summer times, we used to have a picnic in Belle Isle [an urban park located on an island in the Detroit River]. . . .” As the post-1965 “second canoe” immigrants arrived, largely from professional and/or student backgrounds that reflected the reformed preferences of the U.S. immigration policies, the differences in their immigration histories and socioeconomic status created two distinctive communities of the predominantly working-class “first canoe” and the predominantly professional “second canoe” (Anderson and Smith, 1983).^{xvi}

Returning to Nisbet’s definition of community as one of “personal intimacy, emotional depth, moral commitment, social cohesion, and continuity in time”, respondents referred to the primary circle of family and friends as their source of community, one marked and maintained separately from secondary circles of persons (often referred to as “Americans”) outside their ethnic group. This is not to say that all the respondents interacted exclusively with coethnics or other Asians only. But if they did, social networks primarily operated on an ethnic, rather than on a pan-Asian level.

The Hmong American respondents, for example, experienced a social networks-based community that intersected with more formal associations and institutions in and beyond southeast Michigan. The Hmong culture is notable for its organization along clans, designated by names and villages/locations of origin and led by the eldest male who serves as the political and cultural representative. Although the Hmong community in the greater Detroit area has a church and a

community center, respondents relied upon family and clan members for mutual assistance, observation of traditional and cultural holidays and occasions, and recreation and socialization. Pat Xiong, a teacher, saw his friends and relatives almost everyday; Chi Lee grew up riding bikes, eating dinners, and having sleepovers with her cousins and attending family/clan gatherings on weekends for dinners and special occasions. Alex Yang explained how clan leaders consult each other for Hmong New Year that marks traditional harvest in Laos to orchestrate the coordination of each clan's festivities. They attended local, regional and national Hmong New Year events and soccer tournaments.

John Lee, Chi's older brother, described having both Hmong and non-Hmong friends as "having the best of both worlds" but he preferred the "sense of family" and mutual support, or communalism that the Hmong family and friends embodied and that "American people" seemed to lack: "The benefits in the Hmong community is – you've got this sense of family that the American people don't have. I've got a sense of family that I know if I call on these people, they'll be there for me."^{xvii} Through family, extended kin, and friendship ties, these respondents forged a sense of community through the observations of holidays, special occasions (such as births, deaths, and marriages), everyday family gatherings, and sports tournaments/picnics.

PRACTICING ETHNIC AND PANETHNIC COMMUNITIES

Without a geographically bounded ethnic enclave but with access to growing number of commercial and service ethnic establishments throughout the suburbs, a majority of respondents nevertheless constructed and experienced community through associations and organizations, faith-based communities, college campus, and informal social networks. First-generation Asian American respondents were more likely to socialize exclusively through their ethnic ties and communities although they did support panethnic organizations that stressed political and economic purposes. Second-generation (including 1.5 generation) Asian Americans first met co-ethnics through their parents' associations and organizations and created their own peer-oriented ethnic and panethnic communities as they grew older; they were more likely to interact with other Asian Americans at schools and at the university with a "critical mass" of Asian American students and whose institutions and curriculum explicitly utilized "Asian American" as a basis of common political ties and shared racial category.

The voluntary nature of these communities means that Asian Americans often have to make an effort to maintain their ethnic and in particular panethnic ties. Race and ethnicity intersect with generation, emigration points of origin, socioeconomic status, religion, and gender to create distinctive and intersecting communities actively maintained through member and organizational efforts. While it contradicts the image that there are no active Asian American communities in Michigan, communities as experienced by the respondents waxed and waned as their participation shifted with other responsibilities and events. Sandy Yu, who belonged to several ethnic and

panethnic organizations, shared the following about instilling Asian American consciousness in her children:

...depending on your stage of life, and your situation, it depends on how much your community means to you... Being Chinese American, at least in the Midwest, it's porous, it's porous, depending if you're active and you get involved, you feel it. But if you're not active and you don't really care much about it, you can exist here, and hopefully not be targeted against....

Yu presents a dilemma; organizations depend on the limited population and participation to keep communities active and visible. Second-generation Korean American Tank Chun said that the small Asian American population translated to an option to become politically active about Asian American issues or "be left alone" within the dominant society. Others, such as college student Sarah Chu said,

I think Michigan as – and the Midwest – as being pretty conservative, not very progressive... On one hand I just want to leave, but at the same time I realize that that's not going to change anything, if I leave. I realize that there's not a whole lot that I can change here by myself, but... I want to. I want to try.^{xviii}

Sixteen second-generation respondents in their twenties and thirties said that regardless of whether they liked living in Michigan, they would move for jobs or educational opportunities. No second-generation respondent who came from predominantly white Michigan hometowns (such as Midland, Traverse City, and Holland) planned to return there. The remaining twenty-four first-generation and second-generation respondents who had finished their secondary education, were working or retired, and had extended family members in the state said they planned to stay in Michigan.

CONCLUSION: RACE, SPACE, AND COMMUNITY FORMATIONS

Ethnic enclaves – geographically demarcated spaces containing commercial and service establishments, institutions, and organizations – are highly visible models of Asian American communities described as "thriving", "advanced", and "authentic". But ethnic enclaves must also be supported by demographic concentration of an ethnic population. Comprising about two percent of the state population in 2000, Asian Americans maintain and practice many forms of communities in Michigan. Whether spatially bounded by college campuses, churches, and temples, or found through informal social networks and associations/ organizations, Michigan Asian American communities refute the ethnic enclave model; rather, they reflect localization as well as the growing heterogeneity of their national counterparts and address the differences through different types of institutions, organizations, associations, and networks. The multiple and malleable qualities of

Michigan Asian American communities indicate a greater need to consider region and space to understand community formations as they diverge from historical bicoastal versions of urban and suburban enclaves.

Asian and Asian Americans in Michigan demonstrate the cultural community model that Ling (2005) has extensively documented and argued in the case of St. Louis Chinese. Associations, organizations, churches, temples, and college campuses - rather than physical ethnic enclaves - act as ethnic and panethnic communities. While they are residentially and commercially dispersed, the respondents in make a conscious and active effort to connect with coethnics, and to a lesser degree, other Asian ethnic groups to shape their communities. These are the "symbolic boundaries of similarities and differences" the respondents use to create the contents of, and attachments to communities (Cohen, 1985).

Ling writes that Chinese St. Louisans have not been "passive victims of institutionalized exclusion and discrimination... Rather, they have been active agents, and both collectively and individually have shaped their communities and histories" (21). However, she observes at the end of book "cultural communities are developing in other American cities besides St. Louis, and among other ethnic groups as well... The development of cultural communities demonstrates that minorities in America are enjoying economic integration and social advancement" (239). Certainly, when compared to the beginnings of Hop Alley - created in response to the dominant society's racial antagonism and segregation as a means of survival - the transformation of the Chinese community is rather astonishing even as it reflects the local, national, and global political changes, economic restructuring, and human migration in the postindustrial era.

The socioeconomic achievements of Asian Americans in Michigan likewise have been well documented and extolled by community members and mainstream press alike (Anderson and Smith, 1983; Glazier and Helweg, 2001). This conceals the struggles of poor and working-class Asian Americans as well as racialization of Asian Americans face despite professional backgrounds, educational levels, middle-class status, and self-identification as Michiganders. First-generation Asian Americans (some who have lived in Michigan and the U.S. longer than their "homeland") and multigenerational Michigan natives continued to utilize *and* reserve ethnic and panethnic community alliances. Out of the forty respondents, twenty-seven (67.5 percent) cited the 1982 Vincent Chin murder as one of the most significant events involving Asian Americans in the Midwest. Although the cultural community may form around shared characteristics that coethnics practice, maintain and transmit while integrating into the dominant society (especially as middle-class, professional citizens), it cannot separate itself from panethnic efforts for political mobilization.

Despite the primacy of ethnic associations, organizations, and networks, panethnic ties were not discarded or ignored. Although only eight respondents said that there was a panethnic Asian American community (rather than distinctive ethnic communities), twelve of the respondents were primarily active in panethnic organizations and issues. The leaders and members of different organizations were invited to other Asian ethnic or panethnic functions and events, which reinforced a collective sociopolitical community. Phillip Chan, a second-generation Chinese American observed, "I think that Midwesterners tend to be more panethnic not really by design but more

because of necessity. . . . My attitude was, because, we kind of have to stick together because nobody else is going to stick up for us.^{2xix}

This paper examined the concepts of region and space within studies of racial and ethnic community formations that address the growing ethnic, socioeconomic, and geographic heterogeneity of Asian America. The localization of community formations, maintenance, and transformations can suggest different models of Asian American communities. Rethinking Asian American communities broadens notions of racial and ethnic identity and community formations by recognizing and mapping how Asian American communities have, and are emerging, in spaces that challenge conceptualizations of where Asian Americans live, work, play, and claim as their own.

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Endnotes

ⁱ The U.S. Office of Management and Budget defines Lapeer, Livingston, Macomb, Oakland, St. Clair, and Wayne counties as the Detroit-Warren-Livonia Metropolitan Area (MSA), while the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG) defines Southeast Michigan as comprised of Livingston, Macomb, Oakland, Washtenaw, Wayne, and St. Clair counties. I use “Southeast Michigan” to describe the geographical clustering of the participants’ hometowns; thirty-four, or 85 percent of the respondents, were from four counties –Macomb, Oakland, Washtenaw, or Wayne –in the Southeast region. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, the three state counties with the highest percentage of Asian Americans were in the southeast Michigan: Washtenaw County had the highest percentage population (6.3) followed by Oakland County (4.1), and Macomb County (2.1).

ⁱⁱ Total percentage includes one race only, mixed race, and mixed ethnicity Asian Americans.

ⁱⁱⁱ Their hometowns were, in alphabetical order: Ann Arbor, Bloomfield Hills, Canton, Dearborn, Detroit, Grosse Ponte Woods, Farmington Hills. Holland, Lansing, Northville,

Midland, Okemos, Pontiac, Rochester Hills, Royal Oak, Sterling Heights, Swartz Creek, Traverse City, Troy, and Warren.

^{iv} The Association of Chinese Americans has a downtown Drop-In/Outreach Center; Chung's, Michigan's oldest Chinese restaurant from the original Chinatown, closed its Cass Corridor location in 2000.

^v "Hyun Jung Yoon," interview by the author (Canton, MI), July 28, 1999.

^{vi} "Jae Hong Park," interview by the author (Ann Arbor, MI), June 29, 1999.

^{vii} "Robin Yu," interview by the author (Livonia, MI), July 31, 1999.

^{viii} "Luis Delgado," interview by the author (Dearborn, MI), August 10 1999.

^{ix} "Amit Jain," interview by the author (Ann Arbor, MI), July 28, 1998.

^x "Monica Shah," interview by the author (Ann Arbor, MI), July 12, 1999.

^{xi} "Kathy Kim," interview by the author (Ann Arbor, MI), July 16, 1999.

^{xii} "Chi Lee," interview by the author (Ann Arbor, MI), June 7, 1999.

^{xiii} "Tae Young Han," interview by the author (Ann Arbor, MI), July 27, 1998.

^{xiv} "Seema Shetty," interview by the author (Troy, MI), July 27, 1999.

^{xv} "Joe Miyamoto," interview by the author, (Ann Arbor, MI), August 4, 1999; "Park," interview. In September 2005, University officials investigated an incident of "ethnic intimidation" in which a white male student allegedly urinated on, and then used racial epithets toward two Asian American students. Asian American student leaders interviewed in the campus newspaper immediately after the incident said that they both had confronted racial bias and discrimination on campus and in the city. In its wake, a students, alumni, faculty, staff, and community members wrote open letters and signed petitions demanding that administrators increase dialogue about hate crimes and assess the status of Asian American students, faculty, and staff on campus; they also organized town hall forums and teach-ins. The accused student pled guilty to two counts of assault and battery for "tossing a beer off a balcony and splashing people below" in March 2006.

^{xvi} "Maria Cruz," interview by the author (Dearborn, MI), August 11, 1999. "Delgado," interview.

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^{xvii} “Chi Lee,” interview; “John Lee,” interview by the author, (Ann Arbor, MI), July 23, 1999; “Pat Xiong,” interview by the author, (Detroit, MI), July 7, 1999; “Alex Yang,” interview by the author, (Ann Arbor, MI), June 3, 1999.

^{xviii} “Chu,” interview.

^{xix} “Phillip Chan,” interview by the author (Ann Arbor, MI), July 29, 1998.