Asian-American Versus Asian-Canadian:
Ethnic Segregation and Implications for a Panethnic Boundary

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Extended Abstract

The panethnic identifier "Asian-American" has been readily accepted in the US vernacular. This is reflected in Asian-American associations and institutions and in the Asian-American research agenda. Asian-American Studies programs are scattered across colleges and universities in the United States and there is a growing body of academic and non-academic literature. The same cannot be said of Canada. The ethnogenesis of an "Asian-Canadian" racial category has not emerged as a distinctive panethnic identity nor has it (yet) taken on the same degree of importance or significance for Asian groups in Canada.

Unique historical circumstances as well as the social and political context in the United States have shaped the development of an Asian racial boundary (Espiritu 1992; Kibria 2002). Structural conditions that place in close proximity those immigrant groups that are perceived to share some cultural or physical characteristics facilitate this shifting of ethnic boundaries. For example, shared neighborhood space by immigrant groups from Asia is likely to set the stage for clearer delineations of who is included and excluded and an increasing awareness of a shared location in the social structure. Residential segregation is thus one condition that can give rise to new ethnic formations as immigrants adapt in a racially stratified society. Variations in such conditions across international contexts suggests that the emergence or strength of an ethnic or panethnic identity should also vary across contexts.

To examine the question of cross-national differences in pan-Asian integration, and more generally, to understand the conditions under which new ethnic identities are formed, this study will compare Asian ethnic residential segregation in Los Angeles and Toronto and examine its implications for Asian ethnicity in the two cities and their respective countries. Los Angeles and Toronto offer a good point of comparison for their prominence in each country as a site for Asian in-migration in the context of a racially diverse urban population.

In Los Angeles and Toronto, Asian single origin groups with at least 4,000 members in each metropolitan area (i.e. the mean size of one census tract) have been selected for analysis. These counts are based on the most recent censuses conducted in each country, the 2000 US census and the 2001 Census of Canada. In the US census, census tract data from SF1 and SF3 will be used. In the Canadian census, visible minority and single response ethnic origins data will be analyzed. Table 1 lists 8 Asian ethnic groups and 1 residual category as well as other racial and ethnic groups included for comparison.

Initially, overall levels of segregation will be estimated for each group as well as pairwise segregation between each pair of groups using the well-known dissimilarity index. Then we will examine the presence of Asian neighborhoods and identify which Asian ethnic groups are the most likely to share neighborhoods with other Asians and compare across metropolitan areas. These results will reveal to what extent we can speak of an Asian residential experience in either of the two places and implications for our understanding of immigrant adaptation and shifting ethnic boundaries, in general, and Asian panethnicity, in particular, in different contexts.

Table 1. Selected Groups in Toronto CMA and Los Angeles CMSA

	Toronto CMA	LA CMSA
Total Population	4.6 million	16.4 million
Percent Foreign-Born	45	31
Chinese	379,550	366,863
Filipino	116,910	371,421
Vietnamese	34,205	233,573
Korean	40,705	257,975
Japanese	13,610	155,959
Asian/East Indian	279,330	104,482
Pakistani	32,110	9,302
Sri Lankan	33,290	4,189
Other Asians	87,570	153,335
Whites	2,915,120	6,387,094
Blacks	310,500	1,200,205
Latin Americans	75,910	57,139
Native Indians	20,305	6,598,488

Source: 2001 Census of Canada, 2000 US Census (SF1, SF3)