

Immigration and Gentrification – a case study of cultural restructuring in Flushing, Queens

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Abstract:

The aim of this article is to introduce how culture and economics intertwine in urban re-structuring before and after the 1990 recession in New York City by using the case study of Flushing, Queens. My research will bring in a cultural perspective to contribute to the understanding of gentrification as economic, social and cultural restructuring under the impact of international immigration. First, this case of neighbourhood transfiguration was initially triggered by a private immigrant developer, not a cooperation, whose successes were based on factors including Taiwanese immigrants' residential and housing preferences in the 1980s and 1990s. Ethnic residential preference and cultural tastes are cultural factors which accelerated gentrification during the early 1990s recession. The residential pattern of Asian immigrants in New York has showed the continued concentration of ethnic enclaves since the 1980s. Secondly, there has been diversification in Flushing since the 1980s, which is different from the kind of gentrification which creates a social, economic, and racial hegemony in a neighbourhood. The diversification of races and ethnicities in this neighbourhood has increased since the 1980s through the contribution of post-1965 and later post-Cold War immigrants, especially the settlement of Asian immigrants. We need to distinguish between gentrification that creates homogenous racial or ethnic communities that push immigrants out, and this new form of super-diversity gentrification, based on a transnational flow of capital that fosters diversity and uses diversity as a form of investment capital.

The first aim of this article is to introduce how culture and economics intertwine in urban re-structuring before and after the 1990 recession in New York City by using the case study of Flushing, Queens. The early 1990s recession was a turning point for gentrification in New York, but this turning point has still not been satisfactorily explained. Many argue that gentrification is now fundamentally different than it was in the 1970s and 1980s, but overlook the details of how it works (Lees 2000). Others (Bondi 1999; Ley 1996) hint

that the process has changed but provide few summaries of what those changes might be. My research will bring in a cultural perspective to contribute to the understanding of gentrification as economic, social and cultural restructuring under the impact of international immigration. Second, this study also discovers that there were two waves of diversification taking place in Flushing. The first wave was caused by post-1965 migration and the second wave by post-Cold War migration. We need to distinguish between gentrification that creates

homogenous racial or ethnic communities that push immigrants out, and this new form of super-diversity gentrification, based on the transnational flow of capital that fosters diversity and uses diversity as a form of investment capital.

Many studies focus on the question of changes in gentrification before and after the 1990 recession and argue that the early 1990s slowdown was actually a precursor to accelerated gentrification because baby boomers might choose the inner city as a place of retirement (Lees and Bondi 1995; Ley 1996). This assumption raises another question concerning the rationale of what and how gentrification takes place in suburban areas. Indeed, Flushing, located in northern Queens, is a newly gentrified suburban city.

Hypotheses, Research Questions and Research Method

This study examines the interconnection of cultural preference and economic factors in the gentrification of Flushing, New York. Gentrification has been defined as the production of urban space for more affluent users. Most studies on gentrification focus on economic factors. In the past 15 years, there have been some debates on both cultural and economic factors in urban studies (Barnes 2003; Ley 1996). The economic school tends to look at the demand and supply side. Some argue that the return of gentrification after 1990 represents nothing less than a reassertion of economics over culture. Recognition of the importance of the cultural factor slowly appears in cases studies, such as Hackworth (2001) and Mitchell (1999). Culture has been recognised as a meaningful – rather than a structurally residual – factor in the production of urban spaces. A wave of urban studies has explored the role of culture in the production of cities during the past decade (Mitchell 1999). Yet the divide between economic or cultural restructuring does not always provide a complete analytical tool. There is no clear division in many case studies.

Both Mitchell and Hackworth point out that the idea is not to simply add culture as an extra autonomous variable in the study of cities. As Mitchell (1993) said, 'Treating culture as an explanatory variable in the production of landscapes can sometimes downplay the ways in which culture is deliberately produced by economic interests to increase the circulation of capital.' For example, Mitchell's study in Vancouver demonstrates how the ethos of multiculturalism was deployed and purposely managed by wealthy Hong Kong real estate interests to justify the hyper-valuation of real estate markets in Vancouver, British Columbia. Her research focused on how the actions of real estate developers increased land value by using ethnic culture as a tactic, or what Hackworth and Rekers (2005) have called the performance of 'ethnic packaging'. Based on her findings, Mitchell suggests that culture is neither completely organic nor completely autonomous in the production of urban space.

Hackworth's (2002) study on gentrification points to four fundamental changes in the way that gentrification works in New York City. First, corporate developers are now more common initial gentrifiers than before. Second, the state, at various levels, is fuelling the process more directly than in the past. Third, anti-gentrification social movements have been marginalised within the urban political sphere. Finally, the land economics of inner-city investment have changed in ways that accelerate certain types of neighbourhood changes.

Many other case studies in New York City neighbourhoods tend to focus on the relationship between gentrification and capital investment in the inner core of New York. In another study on citywide inner-city real estate investment, gentrification, and economic recession in New York City, Hackworth (2001) discovered that suburban areas of eastern Queens, southern Staten Island, and the eastern Bronx experienced a milder reduction of sales activity during the recession than the inner core. After the recession, the highest

percentage gains in sales activity were experienced in the inner core, whereas the suburban fringe experienced a more limited rise. New construction activity was relegated mostly to the suburban fringe of the city – predominately to Staten Island and eastern Queens. Much of central Queens experienced a decrease in the number of demolitions during the recession, suggesting that disinvestment there was slowing. Massive immigration throughout the 1990s had kept demand for housing there strong (Hackworth 2001).

The change of centre/periphery growth is different to ethnic concentration in Queens. How do we understand ethnic concentration as in the case of Flushing? Is it white flight, an ethnic enclave or ethnic succession? Historically, Chinatown has been viewed as an ethnic ghetto or minority community. Earlier studies consider Chinatowns in North America as 'characterized by a concentration of Chinese people and economic activities in one or more city block which forms a unique component of the urban fabric. It is basically an idiosyncratic oriental community amidst an occidental urban environment' (Lai 1973: 101). New immigrants consider ethnic communities to be a shelter within the host society. They obtain ethnic social capital by finding documented or undocumented jobs from co-ethnic employers and also find comfort in enclaves due to the limitation of linguistic dependency and ethnic food preferences.

As for the decrease of the white population in Flushing, it was partially caused by the old residents moving out after selling their properties to newcomers for hundreds of thousands of dollars. 'White flight' is a term indicating the departure of white residents from urban communities as the population of minority residents increases. Laura Pulidos believes that the process of suburbanisation and urban decentralisation contributed to contemporary environmental racism (Pulido 2000). The decline of the white population was associated with the increase of the Asian population. In an interview with me, Dr. L. F.

Chen, member of the Taiwan Merchant Association and member of the board of directors of the Taiwan Center, notes that there was discontent and conflict with old white residents during the increase of the Asian population in the 1980s and 1990s.

'Ethnic enclave' is a term indicating that an ethnic neighbourhood retains cultural distinction from a larger, surrounding area. It also indicates an ethnic business that is run by the members of the community. Ethnic enclaves may be formed involuntarily, which is similar to the concept of an 'ethnic ghetto', due to housing discrimination or the preference of religious minorities. What are the initial decisions establishing a divided ethnic neighbourhood separate from main-stream culture and old Chinatown? In this regard, I will elaborate on the history of the building of 'little Taipei' in Flushing later. Community business leaders in Flushing may also find ways to promote ethnic enclaves as tourist attractions, such as the promotion of the Lunar New Year Parade.

Could ethnic enclaves trigger gentrification? Hackworth and Rekers (2005) argue that some of these areas function as abrading mechanisms to produce nearby residential gentrification. Some neighbourhood institutions have recognised this attraction and have begun to manufacture a saleable form of ethnicity to tourists and prospective residents alike, called 'ethnic packaging' in reference to the process of gentrification in Canada. Hackworth and Rekers discovered that '[t]hese institutions actively manage and sell an ethnic identity that is increasingly at odds with nearby residential patterns. The commercial areas of these neighborhoods now function less as areas of identification of the stated group, and more as ways to market each neighborhood's residential real estate markets' (Hackworth and Rekers 2005: 23). Could packaged ethnicity facilitate gentrification? Hackworth and Rekers present several thriving cases in Canada in which they explored the relationship between produced culture and economics in the

gentrification of ethnically defined inner-city neighbourhoods (Hackworth and Rekers 2005).

While examining social change in Canadian inner cities since 1970, David Ley (1996) hypothesised that the resurgence of the middle class in downtown areas is linked to the growth of professional and managerial employment in service industries and to favourable government policies. Ley documents the emergence of a new middle class and the origins of their residential preferences for downtown neighbourhoods. He concludes that neighbourhood movements and reform politics have been elitist, mainly serving the interests of the affluent new middle class, and that reform politics also foundered due to the divided interests of the new middle class.

Like Ley, the 'culture school' sees gentrification as spatial expression of a critical class (Caufield 1994; Ley 1996), built on the notion of consumer dominance in tastes. According to this view, neighbourhoods gentrify primarily because tastes and preferences have changed, including an increasingly large segment of society that rejects the suburbs – because of the distance to work, the isolation, the lack of diversity – in favour of inner-city living (Ley 1996). In the case of Flushing, gentrification involves the changing tastes of different ethnicities instead of simple social classes. The changing tastes of ethnicities refer not only to change in consumption, but also to changes in values and beliefs, etc.

The research used in this study involved a triangulation of methods, including ethnography, GIS analysis, and focus groups. The ethnography and focus groups were carried out during the Ecology of Learning Project between October 2007 and June 2008. GIS analysis was conducted together with Dr. Norbert Winnige at the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity in 2010. United States census data was used to identify the pattern of ethnic residential preference.

Transfiguration of Flushing

Throughout its history, New York has been a city of immigrants and one of the gateway cities to the United States. The flow of immigrants has changed not only the demographics of New York, but has also revitalised some declining neighbourhoods. My research has discovered that Flushing is not a 'satellite city' of the traditional Chinatown (Manhattan) as described by sociologist Jan Lin (Lin 1998). This article argues that the rise of Flushing created a promised land for Taiwanese entrepreneurs in the 1980s and 1990s and has more recently become a new centre for ethnic Chinese immigrants after September 11, 2001.

From 1880 to 1920, close to a million and a half immigrants arrived and settled in the city, so by 1910 fully 41 percent of all New Yorkers were foreign-born (Foner 2007). More than two and a half million have arrived since 1965. A survey of New York City households taken by the US Census Bureau in 1999 revealed that 40 percent of the city's 7.4 million people are now foreign-born.¹ The top five groups in 1990 – Dominicans, Chinese, Jamaicans, Italians, and residents of the former USSR – made up just under 30 percent of all post-1965 arrivals there. In 1998, the top five groups were Dominicans, immigrants from the former Soviet Union, Mexicans, Chinese, and Guyanese.²

Asians coming to America, including Chinese, have increasingly settled in Queens, New York. We have witnessed the concentration of Asian residences and the new formation of an Asiantown in Queens. In 2000, half of Asian New Yorkers lived in Queens, where Asians constituted 19 percent of the population.³ According to the 1990 Census,

¹ U.S. Census Bureau 1990, <http://www.census.gov/>.

² U.S. Census Bureau, March 1998, <http://www.census.gov/>.

³ Asian American Federation, <http://www.aafny.org/default.asp>; U.S. Census Bureau 2000, <http://www.census.gov/>.

there were 164,586 Asian Americans living in Queens. Among them, 145,362 were post-1965 arrivals.⁴ In 1998, the number went up to 159,973.⁵ Asians comprised nearly a quarter of the city's post-1964 foreign-born population (Foner 2000).

Since the 1980s, Flushing, Queens, has been the site of a new and revived commercial zone. Its prosperity reflects not only the successful investment of Taiwanese and Korean merchants, but also the formation of a new Asian community with a unique kind of religious pluralism. The 2000 United States Census Bureau ranked Queens County as the ninth most populous county in the United States with over 2.2 million residents.⁶ According to the Census Bureau, Queens County experienced an over 14 percent increase in population since the 1990 census. The 2000 Census also reflected the growth of the Asian population in Queens County with over 391,500 people identifying themselves as Asian Americans. More than half of Flushing's population is Asian American, and many of the neighbourhoods around Flushing also have an increasing number of Asian American residents. It is also claimed that Flushing has the largest ethnic Chinese community in the New York metropolitan area, surpassing the number in Manhattan's Chinatown.

A Different Kind of Gentrification Triggered by a Minority Group

The initial transfiguration of Flushing took place in early 1981, before the financial recession in the late 1980s, and was triggered by a minority group, Taiwanese American immigrants. Similar to Hackworth's description, developers, seeking potential benefit, usually initiated changes. The initiative which prompted the transfiguration of Flushing was

started by a single Taiwanese immigrant, Tommy Huang. One might expect to see the involvement of the state in fostering this transformation, but, interestingly, the state was not present in this case. The Flushing Business Improvement District (BID) was not established until September 2003, disregarding the protest from small merchants who were afraid of being marginalised by this transition. The aid of the local government arrived after the transfiguration of this neighbourhood. Finally, the anti-gentrification movements were initiated by old white residents who had been marginalised and eventually moved out of the neighbourhood by selling their properties. This is somewhat different from Hackworth's description of gentrification.

Gentrification in the area can be traced to a Taiwanese developer and the savings he brought with his family from his home country. From the 1930s to the 1950s, the neighbourhood had been predominantly white Anglo-Saxon Protestant and most churches had large, active memberships. In 1981, there were only two restaurants in downtown Flushing; in 1998, this area became the fifth largest shopping area in New York City. How did this development take place? One man, Tommy Huang, created a real-estate empire in Queens by constructing hundreds of buildings, a tale begun on Main Street in Flushing. No one could have predicted that the 27-year-old Huang would create New York's second Asiantown in the 1990s.

There are several reasons for the concentration and investment of Taiwanese business capital in downtown Flushing. First of all, starting in the late 1970s, these family-oriented type immigrants were middle-class people who owned private capital and who emigrated from Taiwan with their fortunes due to the development of Taiwan's economy. This middle-class population lost their old business networks when they migrated, but real estate was still a business in which they prospered. Second, in the 1980s, a global immigration market where nation-states

⁴ U.S. Census Bureau 1990, <http://www.census.gov/>.

⁵ U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1990 and March 1998.

⁶ U.S. Census Bureau 2000, <http://www.census.gov/>.

competed with each other to attract potential business immigration emerged. Immigrant visas became ever more available to people with financial resources who were willing to invest in the host country (Tseng 1997). The major question became where they would invest in real estate. Why would Taiwanese newcomers choose Flushing over Elmhurst, which was also a main destination for many early Taiwanese immigrants in New York? Investment in Flushing created one of the few alternatives to Manhattan Chinatown for many Taiwanese immigrants, including Taiwanese overseas nationalists and individual investors. However, my interview with Tommy Huang, a pioneer private developer, unveils the cultural logics that underlie both residential and investment preferences for early Taiwanese Americans.

According to the interviews with Tommy Huang and L. F. Chen, Huang's vision brought him to invest in downtown Flushing, a declining neighbourhood where more than 50 percent of shops were closed in the 1980s. Huang started his first development project on Main Street between 37th Avenue and 38th Avenue. He first targeted new Taiwanese immigrants based on the calculation of cultural and social capital. Due to zoning restrictions, some land Huang purchased in downtown Flushing was intended for commercial and light industry purposes. For commercial zones, office buildings are built and sold for business quickly. More than half of the commercial buildings were built by Huang in the 1980s, and later five apartment buildings and one mall. Yet his first success was with commercial-and-residential combination buildings.

How could a small developer with only \$500,000 transfigure the landscape of downtown Flushing? The economic decline of downtown Flushing may have provided a golden chance of buying inexpensive land, but it was culture factors that helped Huang sell his first building even without actually starting construction. Huang realised that Taiwanese immigrants favoured commercial-and-resi-

dential combination housing, as they did in Taiwan. Huang designed the three-story buildings mixing street-level stores and second and third levels of residential housing. Owners could easily rent the first and second levels to new immigrants and live on the top level. Many of them might also choose to run small businesses on street-level stores, rent the second floor out, and live on the top floor. This kind of building design reflected the characters of Taiwanese as conservative investors who gained the security of owning real estate.

Mixing commercial and residential housing also provided a financial benefit. Legal restrictions prohibit developers from selling residential buildings before they complete the whole construction. In contrast, New York state law was more relaxed on commercial buildings. Huang could actually start collecting 10 percent of the down payment by showing his floor plans to his buyers, and another 10 percent after the developers finished partial construction of buildings. Therefore, Huang, as a small developer, could create the Flushing miracle with limited capital within a decade.

Huang's innovation in real estate development is based on his careful calculation of the cultural habits of new Taiwanese immigrants in the 1980s and New York State Law. Before the 1980s, most Taiwanese and Asian immigrants lived in Elmhurst, Queens, an ethnic enclave, or later, in Long Island for better school districts. Why would Taiwanese and Asians move to Flushing? I argue that it is because of ethnic residential preference, cultural taste or cultural preference. Here I provide two analyses to prove this assertion. The first one is a counter-argument to that of Jan Lin, who regarded the transfiguration of Flushing as a satellite city of old Chinatown in Manhattan. The second is an analysis of residential patterns based on US census data since the 1980s.

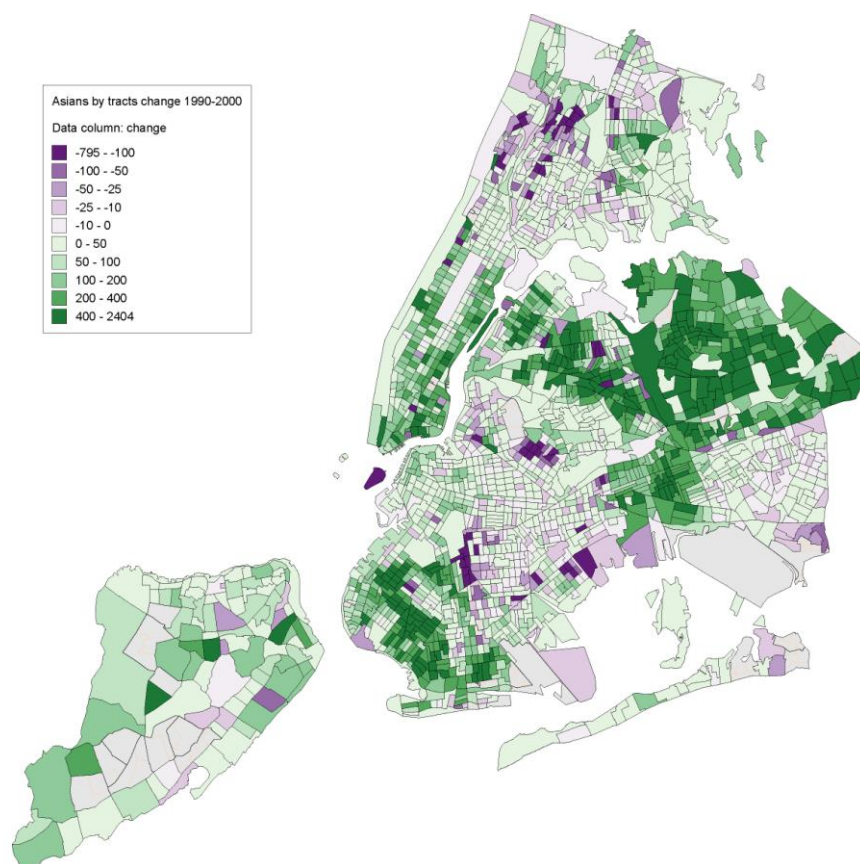
Lin (1998) argues that the emergence of satellite Chinatowns in the outer boroughs of New York City is mainly an outcome of congestion in the core Chinatown of Manhattan. As Lin pointed out, the emergence of a gateway

town conforms with an emerging area of primary settlement for new immigrants to the metropolis. Examples of this are Crown Heights for West Indians and 'little Odessa' in Brighton Beach for Russian Jews. These trends contrast with classic urban suppositions that inner-ring suburbs (such as New York's outer boroughs) would be areas of secondary settlement for upwardly mobile immigrants (Lin 1998).

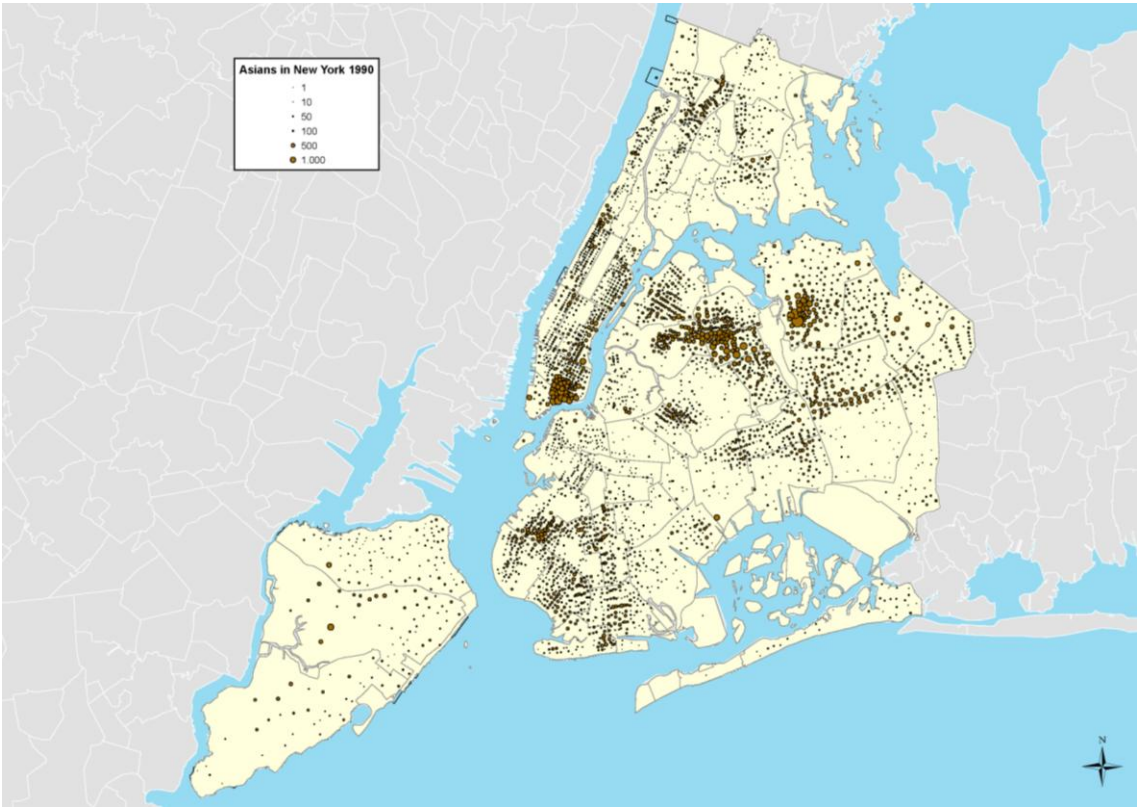
Although Flushing today has become a gateway for new flows of labour and capital that are leapfrogging the core, I disagree with Lin's claim that Flushing, which he calls a satellite Chinatown, was initially formed as an area of secondary settlement. The investment in Flushing was based on a developer's careful calculation that Taiwanese immigrants were seeking a politically, socially, and ethnically different settlement area than that of 'traditional Chinatown', where most of the old settlers

were from Taishan, Canton, and Hong Kong.

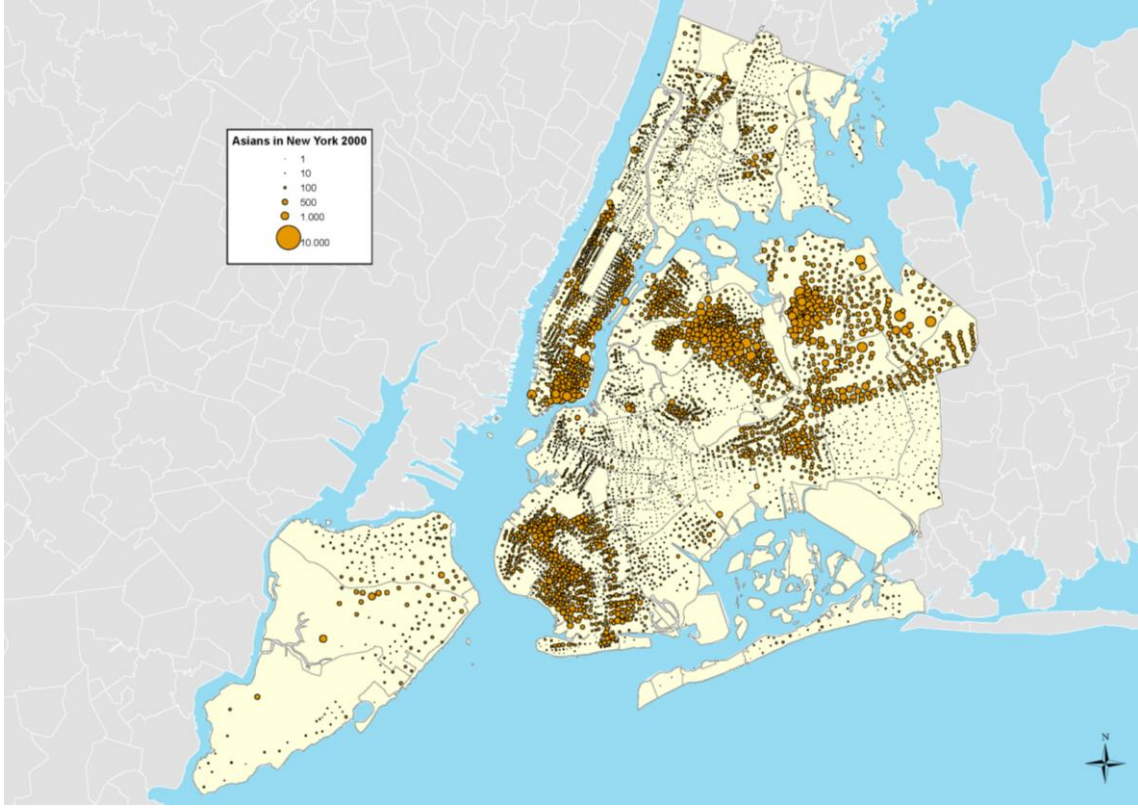
Lin correctly observed the emergence of a satellite, such as the new Chinatown on Eighth Avenue in Brooklyn (or sometimes called Sunset Park Chinatown). This satellite is an extension of both the lower and upper circuits of the enclave economy; restaurants and garment sweatshops can be found in satellite Chinatowns as well as transnational banks and foreign investors. Lin also stressed that residential and economic decentralisation on a fundamental level is determined by ecological variables of population density, scarcity of housing, and high land values in the urban core. Residential out-movers are additionally motivated by preferences for privacy and space; their outward geographic mobility, enabled by household savings, also reflects upward social mobility. Economic out-movers follow somewhat in the path of residential decentralisation; small enterprises find that labour is available in



Map 1. Asians by track change 1990-2000. Dr. Norbert Winnige and Weishan Huang.



Map 2. Asians in New York 1990, Dr. Norbert Winnige and Weishan Huang.



Map 3. Asians in New York 2000. Dr. Norbert Winnige and Weishan Huang.

the outer boroughs, and banks similarly find that residents there have monetary savings to deposit and invest (Lin 1998).

In the late 1990s, Flushing received more and more new Chinese immigrants not only from southern China but also from both eastern and northern China. Where do they like to live and whom do they like to live with? Our GIS map tells us that Asians tend to live with Asians in New York, including in four Asian concentration neighbourhoods.

On this map, besides the heavy concentration of Chinese in traditional Chinatown, Manhattan, Asians tend to choose neighbourhoods with a high concentration of Asians. This similar residential pattern of Asians can be observed in the neighbourhoods of Flushing (Queens), Elmhurst (Queens), and Sunset Park (Brooklyn).

Map 2 and Map 3 illustrate the process of concentration of Asians. US Census data can only illustrate the special choices for new Asian immigrants, but cannot tell us more about who they are and how they make the decisions about residential preference. My previous ethnography has discovered that Taiwanese elites and nationalists tend to choose Flushing, Queens, as new settlement because of social, political, and economic reasons. Taiwanese elites, many of whom have high educational backgrounds, preferred to live in Flushing in order separate themselves from the image of traditional working-class immigrants in Chinatown, Manhattan. Overseas Taiwanese nationalists, many of whom were persecuted by the Kuomintang (Muo Ming Party) regime and could not return to Taiwan, were busy building a 'Little Taipei' as a base for political solidarity. The examination of the Asian immigrant profile in Flushing will continue in the next section.

The Investment in a New Promised Land – the Continued Gentrification of the Neighbourhood

The gentrification of Flushing did not slow down because of the economic recession. We see the pattern of continued concentration of

ethnic residential patterns in Flushing (also Sunset Park in Brooklyn). Cultural gentrification accelerates and sustains the continued economic gentrification in these neighbourhoods.

According to the US census, in 2006, the Chinese population made up 57 percent (63,811) of the entire Asian population in Community District 7, Flushing. In 2006, Flushing residents in CD 7 were composed of 57 percent Chinese, 26 percent Korean, 8 percent Indian, 4 percent Filipino and 5 percent other Asian immigrants.⁷

Chinese immigrants increasingly moved to Flushing for business and for residence purposes. The building of a 'Little Taipei' in Flushing faded in the late 1990s as post-Cold War Chinese new immigrants quickly outnumbered Taiwanese immigrants. When post-Cold War Chinese immigrants moved into New York, their presence further diversified the already diverse ethnic communities. Each ethnic sub-group tends to form its own social networks for business and later hometown associations for political identity and solidarity. New York has witnessed an increased process of diversification of cultural and political groupings among ethnic Chinese communities over the last two decades.

According to the information from the New York City Planning Department, the continued trend of neighbourhood gentrification in Flushing continues. The median rent has increased from \$832 in 2000, to \$1095 in 2005 and \$1160 in 2006, which is almost a 40 percent increase in six years. The median home value has increased from \$269,043 in 2000, to \$496,500 in 2005 to \$535,700 in 2006, which is almost a 50 percent increase in six years.⁸

Ethnicity and cultural intimacy among Asian immigrants are the factors accelerating the gentrification. The capital investment of

⁷ New York City Department of City Planning, <http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/home.html>.

⁸ New York City Department of Planning, <http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/home.html>.

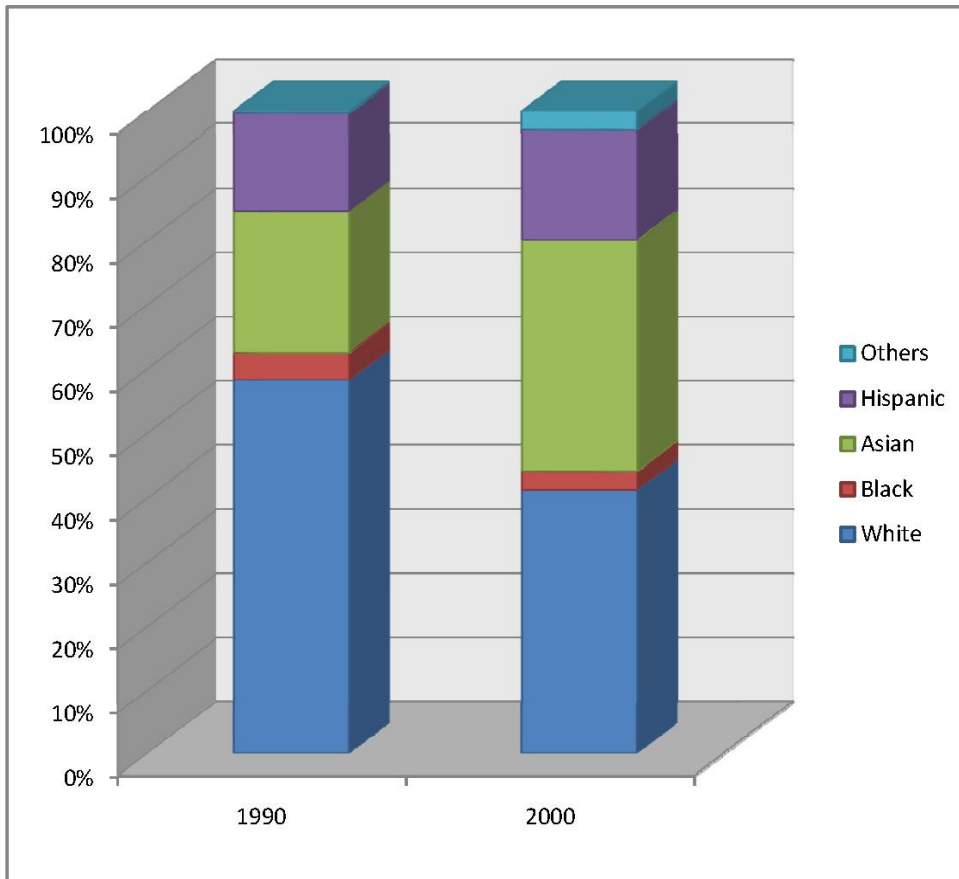


Figure 1: CD 7 Asian composition 1990-2000. Dr. Norbert Winnige.

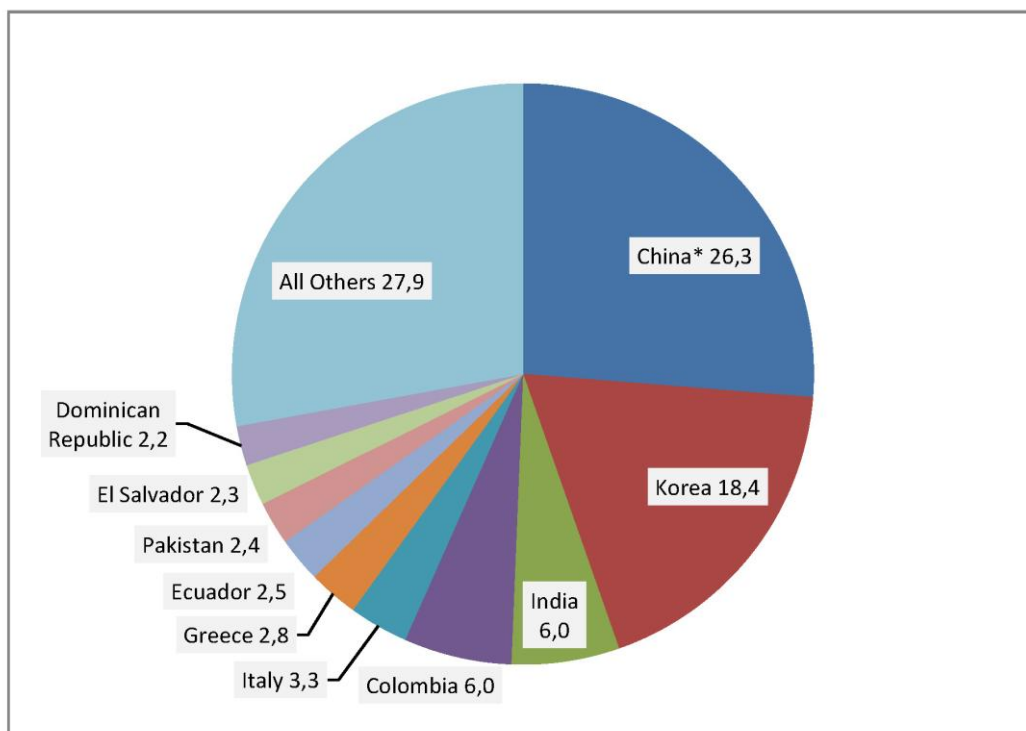


Figure 2: CD 7 Foreign-born population 2000. Dr. Norbert Winnige.

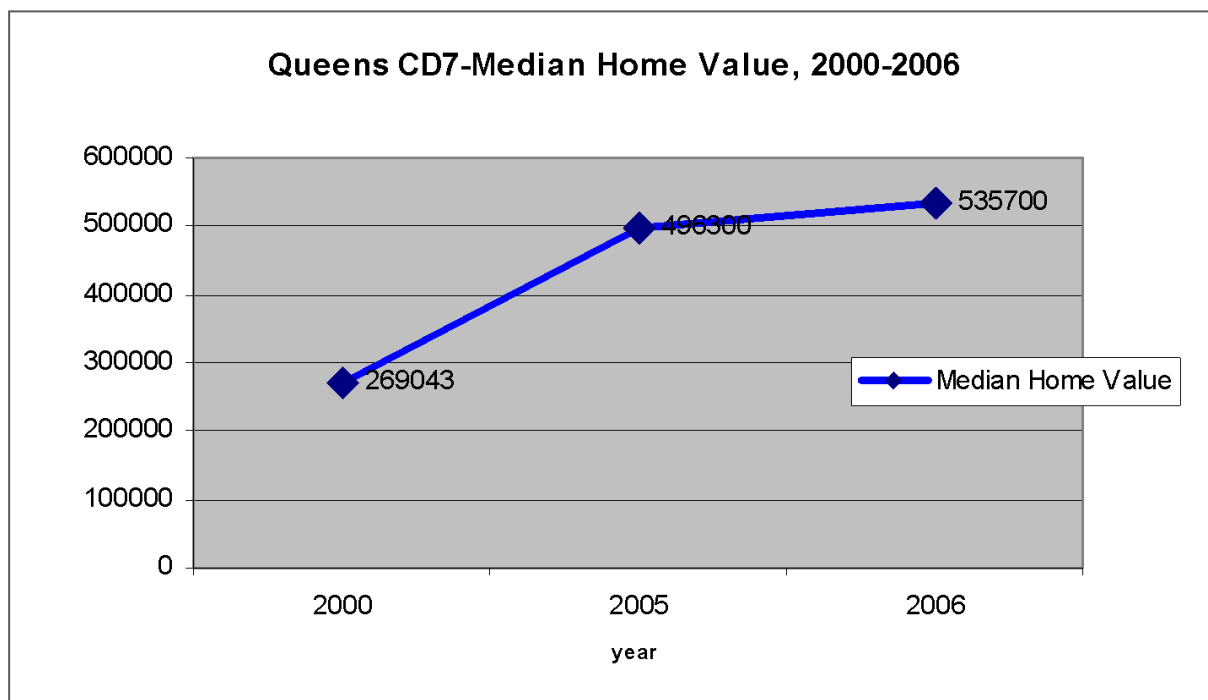
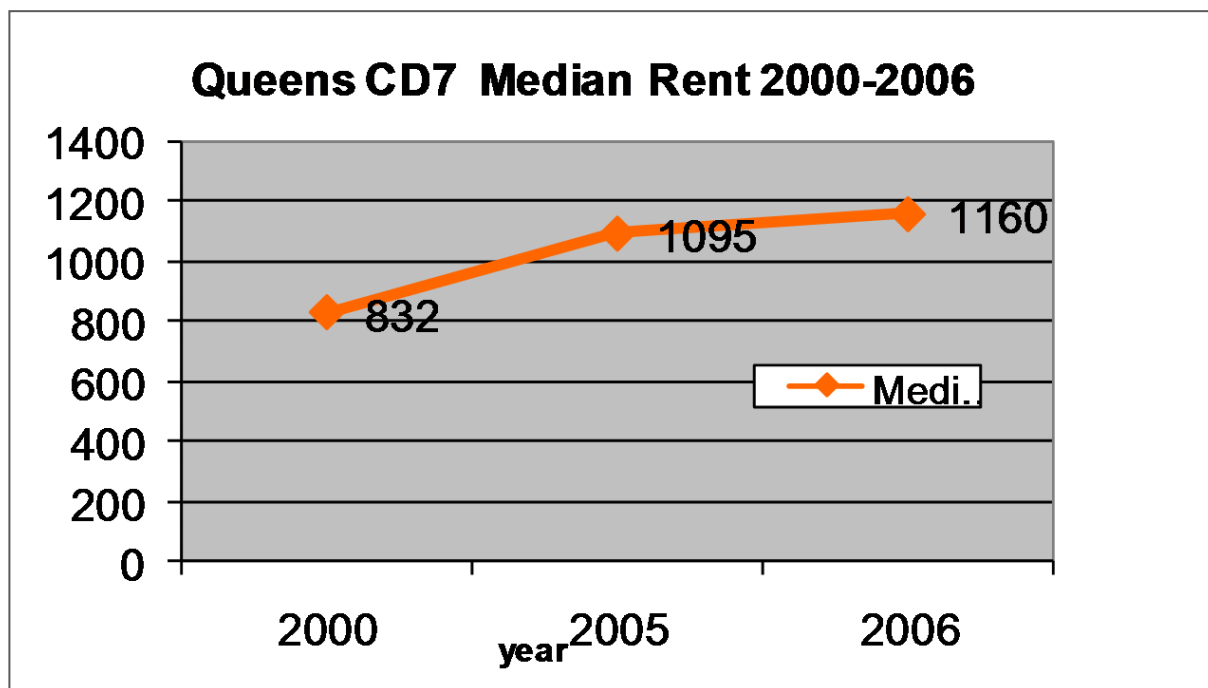


Figure 3: EOL project in 2008.

Taiwanese immigrants in downtown Flushing is a significant element in the commercialisation of this area, yet Korean immigrants were also involved in this hot market (Chen 1992). Flushing was declining in the 1980s, but in the eyes of Taiwanese immigrant developers, Flushing is a place that serves as an important transportation hub in Queens, a location with great potential to realise their dream in the

United States, and a promised land for economic and social well-being.

Conclusion

The above analysis of US census data and ethnography aims to bring a cultural explanation to the study of gentrification before and after the recession of 1990 in Flushing, Queens. First, this case of neighbourhood

transfiguration was initially triggered by a private immigrant developer, not a cooperation, whose successes were based on the factors including Taiwanese's residential and housing preference in the 1980s and 1990s. Ethnic residential preference and cultural tastes are cultural factors which accelerated gentrification during the early 1990s recession. The residential pattern of Asian immigrants in New York has showed the continued concentration of ethnic enclaves since the 1980s, as Map 1 and Map 2 demonstrated. The cultural perspective fills in the gap of our understanding that gentrification in Flushing is not just an economic and social restructuring, but that ethnicity and culture are the main factors generating and accelerating gentrification. This suggests that there is a strong connection between cultural identity and gentrification, which may apply in other case studies as well.

This data contradicts Hackworth and Smith's (2001) claim that the changing state of gentrification indicates the return of heavy state intervention in the process. They argue that state intervention has returned because, first, continued devolution of federal states has placed even more pressure on the local government to actively pursue redevelopment and gentrification as ways of generating tax revenue, and second, the diffusion of gentrification into more remote portions of the urban landscape poses profit risks that are beyond the capacity of individual capitalists to manage. In contrast to this argument, I did not find the hand of local or federal governments in Flushing's gentrification.

Secondly, there has been diversification in Flushing since the 1980s, which is different from the kind of gentrification which creates a social, economic, and racial hegemony in a neighbourhood. The diversification of races and ethnicities in this neighbourhood has increased since the 1980s through the contribution of post-1965 and later post-Cold War immigrants, especially the settlement of Asian immigrants. This has led to historian Scott

Hanson referring to Flushing as 'the most religiously diverse community in America... There are over 200 places of worship in a small urban neighborhood about 2.5 square miles'.⁹ Today, you can find the Quaker Meeting House, St. George Episcopal Church, the Free Synagogue of Flushing, St. Andrew Avellino Roman Catholic Church, St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church, existing side-by-side with immigrants' churches, and Buddhist Hindu and Sikh temples in Flushing, which were built by diverse new residents.

Steven Vertovec has coined the term 'super-diversity' (Vertovec 2007) to describe the extreme pluralisation of minorities which is increasingly an aspect of European mega-cities. Yet European super-diversity is still characterised by an increasing pluralisation of minorities facing relatively homogeneous national majorities. One interesting concept of super-diversity is noting similar changes in urban settings in both North American and European cities and patterns of diversification among ethnic groups themselves (Fong and Shibuya 2005; Vertovec 2007). I have found a similar story in Flushing.

There is a multidimensional diversity that we have to recognise in the ethnic Chinese community in New York, which includes linguistic, social-cultural, social-economic, and social-political diversity. Regarding linguistic diversity, the earlier Chinese immigrants speak Taishanese and Cantonese while Taiwanese immigrants speak Taiwanese. The newcomers include those from Fuzhou, who speak Fuzhouese, Wenzhou, who speak Wenzhouese, Shanghai, who speak Shanghaiese, and Southeast Asian Chinese immigrants, who speak various dialects. Most ethnic Chinese can communicate in Mandarin. In addition to linguistic diversity, ethnic Chinese immigrants

⁹ 'Historian Scott Hanson Discusses Religious Diversity in America'. *Ask America* webchat transcript, August 19 2008, <http://www.america.gov/st/texttrans-english/2008/August/20080819162731xjsnommis0.5391199.html> (accessed 9 September 2010).

often have distinctive cultural customs. As for socioeconomic diversity, old immigrants and Hongkongese have more capital and are generally middle class. Newcomers, such as those from Fuzhou, have less capital and are usually blue collar workers. As for sociopolitical diversity, ethnic Chinese immigrants are from everywhere in Asia, hence, they have various political identities and can build hardly any solidarity in political action.

In ethnic Chinese communities, the pattern of diversification has taken place since 1965, adding the new wave of Taiwanese immigrants to old Cantonese immigrants, a second wave of undocumented Fuzhouese immigrants since the late 1980s, and in a more current post-Cold War wave, Chinese immigrants from

various provinces of China who have immigrated since the opening of China.

As this research revealed, instead of explanations resting solely on economic or solely on cultural arguments, we need to examine how culture and economics intertwine in urban re-structuring. We need to distinguish between gentrification that creates homogenous racial or ethnic communities that push immigrants out, and this new form of super-diversity gentrification, based on a transnational flow of capital that fosters diversity and uses diversity as a form of investment capital. While concepts of class are still relevant, this type of analysis needs to pay attention to class distinction within immigrant communities.

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